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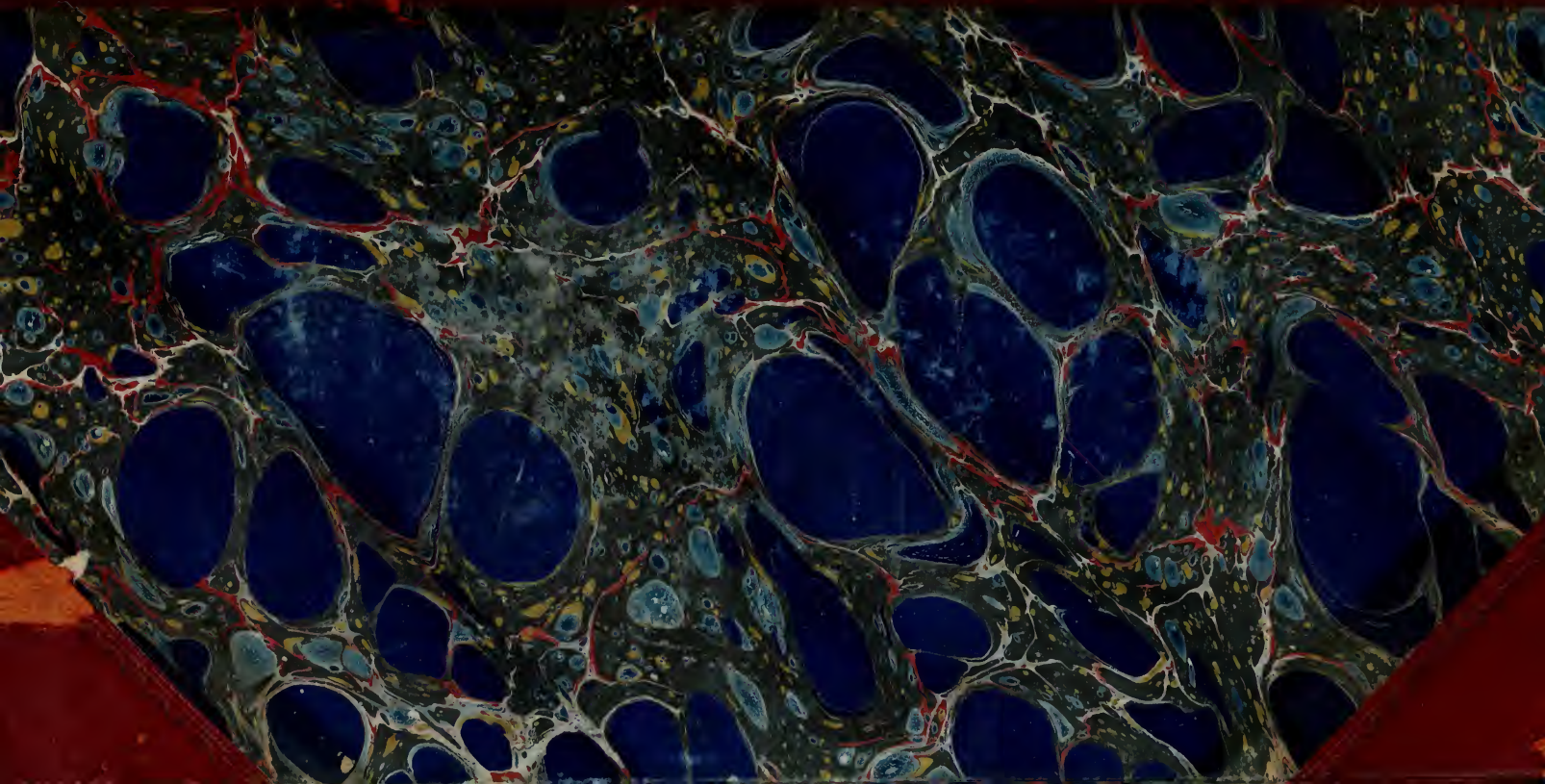

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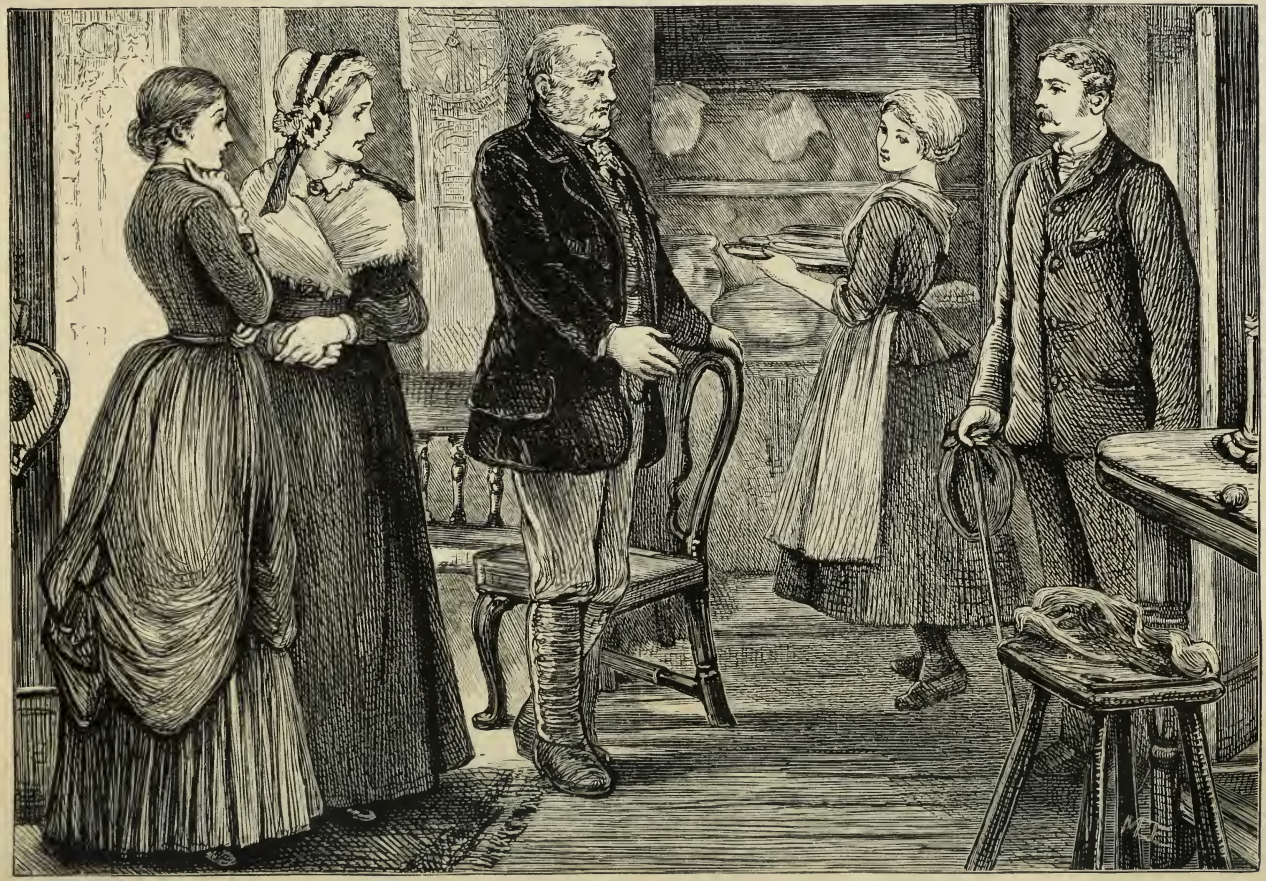

M. ELLEN STAPLES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

THERE WAS NO HESITANCY AS TO GEORGE'S REMAINING THERE FOR THE NIGHT.

"Laden with Golden Grain."

THE

ARGOSY.

EDITED BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD.

VOLUME XXXIX.

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"There was no hesitancy as to George's remaining there for the night."
"And do you really say that they do not at home yet know where you are?"
"On Maria's ear there fell in a low whisper, one single word 'Beware!'"
"To see him take it like this, frightened her more than all."
"It was a hamper we found out of doors."
"The diamond cross was gone."

Illustrations to "Among the Welsh."

THE ARGOSY.

JANUARY, 1885.

THE MYSTERY OF ALLAN GRALE.

CHAPTER I.

THE FARM BY THE LOCH.

NIGHT was fast settling down over a wild mountain pass. There might be still a few pale sunset glories lingering in the west, but these could not be seen from the deep ravine, round which the great hills seemed, in the uncertain light, to draw closer and closer. It was a desolate spot. The straggling fringes of pines and firs, which softened the austerity of some of the fastnesses around, were wholly wanting here. The valley-bottom was chiefly swamp, rendered almost the more treacherous by the masses of stone which the storms of winter had hurled upon it from the hill-tops. No bird could build a nest in that valley. The sheep seldom wandered there. An eagle might occasionally career above it, and its scream would be the appropriate voice of the Spirit of Desolation which brooded over the place. But the only sound of its own was the lap of a flowing stream among the stones—a stream whose course one could easily imagine no human foot had ever tracked.

But stop! Can it be that in this lonesome valley even at this bewildering twilight hour there are voices?

The voices are those of two young men. They wear tourist suits of dark blue serge, and have knapsacks strapped to their shoulders. And they walk one behind the other, picking their way through the stony morass, but always hugging the bank of that little stream, as if it seemed to them a living guide through that Valley of the Shadow of Death.

He who walked first, George Vivian, was a young man of gallant bearing and handsome countenance, with the features which belong to those races and ranks of men who contend and command. And yet his face, altogether, had not their expression. Perhaps the fatigues and anxieties of a day of lost wandering had hollowed it a little,

relaxing the firmer lines of the mouth. Perhaps the eyes were too large, or the complexion too effeminate, for its native delicacy asserted itself, even in spite of the sun-browning of a pedestrian tour.

His companion, Allan Grale, was scarcely as tall, and followed on his springy steps with a firmer tread. He had curling chesnut hair, a florid, healthy complexion, and a face of that rather commonplace order which is generally styled "good-looking." Perhaps a subtle physiognomist, looking keenly, might have shaken his head.

"Well!" cried George Vivian, springing on a boulder rather higher and bigger than the rest, and then stopping short, and looking round. "Well! when at noon to-day we first found that we had left the right road, I wish I had remembered the old saying: that when you lose yourself, the best way is to turn back, retrace your steps, and then start again fair."

"It's a pity you did not think of that at the right time," said Allan Grale, standing behind him. "It's too late now."

"I did think of it," admitted George, moving forward. "But the scenery was so grand, that the temptation to go on was great. I could not believe we had got very far out of the right way. This stream must end somewhere; probably in the lake itself. And that is, in a way, our proper goal."

"It does not follow that there will be any accommodation for travellers when we get there," returned Allan, with a laugh.

"There may be a sheiling or a shanty of some sort; there generally is. At least we shall know where we are."

"It will be dark presently," said Allan; "and then, if the moon does not shine, I suppose there will be nothing for us but to wait where we are till dawn."

George Vivian gave a shiver. "We must press on while we can."

"What a nine days' wonder it would make in Dering if we suddenly disappeared!" mused Allan. Unlike his companion, he was an unimaginative man, and found only a half-agreeable sensation in turning over the thought of horrors, which set all George's nerves ajar. "The governor would think I had run off, and begin overhauling my desks and documents. He would find some things which might rather astonish him, poor old man!"

"Aye—I'm afraid that would be the case with too many of us," responded George fervently. "We have not always been wise. Well, if anything happened to me, there are some papers of mine which I hope Maria might be the first to come across. Maria would do her best to be kindly to—everybody!"

"Confound it!" cried Allan Grale, "there's one little box of mine that will keep coming into my head, ever since we lost ourselves to-day. I ought to have thought about it before I came away. It's too late, now."

"I don't know how it is, Allan," said George not unkindly, but in response to something in Allan's tone which had jarred upon him,

"at times there's something about you which makes me wonder why I like you so much, why I like you at all. I wish I knew which side of you is really you!"

Allan laughed again, not in the least offended. "A little of both, I expect," he answered.

"I don't mean that you are ever worse than other fellows," George hastened to explain; "I believe, at your worst, you are better than most. I tell Maria so. I stand up for you in that quarter, believe me."

All along their way, even as an accompaniment to their conversation, Allan had kept up gay little whistlings, as he scrambled on. Perhaps this had served to keep the silence of the gloomy pass from pressing too hard upon his careless soul! But now these sounds ceased.

"I wonder if Maria will ever marry me," he said suddenly, in a voice which scarcely seemed his own.

"Of course she will," answered George, "when you've made up your quarrel. See! we have not been losing our time and strength after all. I think the lake cannot be far off now."

For the valley was opening before them, with a sudden descent to lower ground, and the little stream changed its even course for a series of low, leaping waterfalls.

But while renewed hope brought new vigour to their wearied limbs, the difficulties of their way were doubled. The light was almost gone now: there was no path anywhere, and no progress but by scrambling or leaping from boulder to boulder by the little river's course, such boulders being slippery with wet moss and water weed, and often so poised as to sway beneath the wariest step. George Vivian, eager and heedless with the thought that it might be still possible to escape a night's camping out, had several slips, and though he saved himself from sprains and fractures, did not manage to keep out of the water, and as he grew wetter, grew also but more zealous and rash.

At last, dark as it was, they were sure that their wanderings had fairly changed in scene. The ground was once more tolerably level, though they still had many a stumble. It was some time since they had scrambled down by the last waterfall: the river was gurgling peaceably over a flat of shingle, and the mountains seemed to have drawn themselves further off, so that the darkness was less oppressive.

"What is that before us?" asked George, suddenly standing still. "I think this must be Loch Maree itself!"

"Perhaps the wish is father to the thought," said young Grale. "Look! What was that gleam? Can it be the reflection of a star?"

"I think it's too dark for that," answered George, moving again. "Let us proceed. If we had but moonlight!"

In a very few minutes there remained no doubt that they had reached the mouth of the little Highland river and the shore of the great Highland lake. This point had been their wished-for goal for many hours past, but they did not find much to elate them now. The

silent desolation here seemed only wider, and not less than that of the valley they had left behind.

"I warned you not to expect to find a first-class hotel, George."

"But they did say there was a farm at this end of the lake. I remember that well: the hotel people said there were boats to be hired there. The farm was called Dagan, or Kagan, or some queer name like that—Gaelic I suppose. They said it had a beautiful view up the loch: and that it sometimes took boarders."

"We are scarcely at the end of the loch," observed Allan, peering into the darkness. "We are on the side. I can make out that much now, even in this gloom, by the way the hills lie. But, remember! the river lies between it and us—and it's pretty broad and strong now."

George stopped in dismay as he peered about him. "The river seemed shallow enough as we came by the side," he observed. "It looks formidable now. But we can both swim a little."

"Speak for yourself," said the other. "Not that I should be afraid if it were light. Still these mountain rivers have treacherous bottoms. Stop!—what could that gleam have been? We both saw it, didn't we? Suppose we watch for it a little."

They stood in silence—Allan's hand on George's shoulder—and watched intently. There was nothing. George gave a convulsive shiver, he felt deadly cold.

"I shall take the river," he said determinedly; "anything is better than staying here."

Allan Grale jumped in after his impatient friend. The water slopped over their feet, then against their knees—but, feeling a-head with their staves, they waded onward. Often they had to pause, their sticks warning them of depths which they did not care to sound. Suddenly, Allan, poking about, gave a joyful cry. "Surely this is earth! Yes, this is grass, here is a bush—here is a tree! The river is not so wide as I thought, after all. But gently; this is not the opposite shore! This is only an island, and I'm afraid——Hark!"

They stood together at the other side. There was a fierce sound of water at their feet, as if the mountain torrent swirled round within some dreadful pass before it hastened on to join the calmer waves of the loch. Allan felt for the bottom with his stick: but the staff found no bottom!

"We should be over our heads there, George," he said: "and even good swimming might not help one if there is a hole. I fear we are worse off here than we have been yet."

"I thought I saw the light again," interrupted George.

Mr. Grale saw the gleam too. "It is very faint," he said. "I lose sight of it, and when I see it again it is in another place—I can't help thinking that it is a light held by somebody in a boat."

"Let us shout!" cried George, eagerly. "If they hear us, surely they will come to the rescue."

They both lifted their voices at once—George in a ringing cry for

"Help here"—Allan in a vigorous "Coo-e-e," which he had learned from some returned Australian.

The great mountains caught up their cries and repeated them to each other, like a circle of mocking Trolls. But before the last echo of their voices had died away, it was mingled with another—a lusty shout of willing and helpful succour.

"Thank God!" said George Vivian earnestly.

Presently, they could hear the measured dipping of the oars, and then the voices of the rowers in consultation.

"We are standing by the tree on the island in the river," shouted Allan. "Can you take us off; or shall we try for some other point?"

A voice replied: "We can take you from there. Don't attempt to move. You are surrounded by bad places."

It was a young man's voice, refined in accent. Miserable as he was, George's imagination instantly began to arrange the unknown into picturesque form. "These must be gentle-people," he thought. "Visitors at a neighbouring hotel perhaps; or may be a laird's family returning from some expedition."

Clearly the water was deep there. For the boat came close up without any grazing, and bumped against the bank. Three people were in her, a shrouded form sitting astern, and two men in kilts, one of whom managed the oars, while the other held out helping hands.

"Let us sit as far from you as we can," said Mr. Vivian with courtesy, "we are dripping wet. We do not know how to thank you."

"You might have easily been drowned if you had tried the Ragan side of the river," said one of the men, not the one who replied to their shouts, for this voice was older and gruffer.

"It was my cousin Morna who heard you," said the younger of the two men. "She made us stop. And even then, we were not sure but we might be answering the cry of some startled bird."

"I was quite sure," said the shrouded form, in a sweet, low voice.

"And the lady heard while you were rowing!" exclaimed George.

"I was listening when I heard the cry," she whispered.

"I am sure this has been most providential for us," he said, turning towards her. "I only fear that we are at present too worn out and wretched to manifest the real warmth of our gratitude."

"Show it where it is due—to Heaven," returned the sweet, low voice. "It is the heart which is read there."

"It seemed rather cool—our hailing your boat," Allan was remarking to the men; "but utter misery always looks for mercy. We were trying to cross the river in quest of a farm which we had heard stood hereabouts, and on whose hospitality we intended to throw ourselves."

"Our farm," said the young man, quietly, "for I suppose you must mean Ragan. Well, I can promise you a kind welcome. I am the farmer's nephew, Colin Vass, and that is his daughter, Morna McOrist."

It was quite plain what the gleam had been which the travellers had seen. Morna held in her hand a small lantern, intended to guide the steps of the party to and from the boat. It shed a flickering light around, but the young lady remained in deepest shadow. At last the boat grated on the shingle, and her cousin took the lantern from her, that she might spring ashore. As he returned it, it illuminated her face, and, bringing it out in strong relief from the surrounding blackness, probably intensified the transparent delicacy of the complexion, the bright gold of the hair, and the poetic fervour of the eye.

"There is a footpath from the landing-point to Ragan," she said, softly, "please to follow me." And as she stepped forward, they followed behind, side by side.

"We expected to get the coach from this point to-morrow, so as to meet our letters and luggage by noonday," whispered George, to Mr. Grale. "I suppose we can do that, yet—I want my letters."

"Miss McOrist," said Allan, "when does the next coach pass here?"

"Not till to-morrow afternoon," she replied.

"Then there is no way of starting for Dingwall earlier than that?"

"Yes, there is," she answered. "A conveyance starts from the hotel below this at six o'clock to-morrow morning. It is not altogether a public conveyance. It runs for the convenience of a gentleman who rents the shooting lodge, and he is always willing to take up travellers."

"And how far off is the hotel? I think I will go on to it."

"Exactly one mile," answered Morna. "But surely you must be fatigued enough. And you are wet. The hotel, too, is full. You could scarcely get accommodation there."

"I'll chance it," decided the young man. "Vivian, you go on to Ragan; you are much more done up than I am; and both of us need not miss the kind chance of a comfortable resting place. I've got dry clothes with me, you know. And I'll secure seats in this conveyance, and look for you to-morrow morning. Mind you don't oversleep yourself. And you must return thanks to our hosts for both of us."

"And, if it suits you better, be quite sure that you may return to Ragan," interposed Morna, "A Highland house is a stranger's home."

CHAPTER II.

THE KNOCK AT THE DOOR.

As they neared Ragan, their steps awakened sounds of life and household interest, which struck George Vivian's ear with a note of welcome, after the fierce silence of the day.

The low house door stood open, with such a glow of warm light streaming through it that, as George followed the Highland girl, he was nearly blinded. But he soon recovered his dazzled vision, and

found himself addressed by a tall spare elderly man, and an equally tall spare woman, much his junior, but pale and faded; while a buxom barefooted lass, in a pink jacket and a very short skirt, was hurrying to and fro, and talking in unknown tongues to Morna McOrist.

There was no hesitancy as to George's remaining there for the night. Both Morna and the servant girl presently vanished upstairs, and George heard hasty footsteps running to and fro overhead. He felt the sudden warmth and light and sense of security almost overpowering. But when his room was announced as ready, he assured his hosts that he would presently return to the family apartment in a fit state to enjoy their kindness.

The bed chamber to which he was shown, was a long low room. On either side, from a very few feet above the floor, the walls sloped inwards, and met in the middle in a sort of rude pointed arch. On an open hearth, a few logs and peats, hastily kindled, were already crackling and sparkling cheerily. The floor was of bare wood, spread here and there with the skins of oxen and deer. The furniture was of the slightest: a chair, a table, a black-framed mirror, dim with the damp of years, and coarse toilet pottery set out on a bench beneath the little window in the roof, through whose curtainless panes only the stars could peep. But the bed, with its plain white hangings and scarlet coverlid looked positively luxurious, and on it were spread sundry cosey flannel garments in which George felt he was expected to array himself. He could not understand how there had been time to prepare so much.

He had not been in his room many minutes before he heard a knock at the door. It made him start, it was so singular a knock, like one sharp blow given by a heavy staff. He cried "Come in." Not being responded to, he opened the door and looked out.

There was nobody there. Sufficient light streamed through the open door downstairs for him to see everything distinctly. He could hear the voices of the household below. George closed the door again, thinking to himself, "What strange tricks one's fancy plays one in unfamiliar places! Doubtless that was some freak of the wind!"

When he went downstairs he found considerable additions had been made to the frugal meal, originally spread for Morna and her cousin. A bowl of "Athol brose" was giving forth its steaming fragrance, and there was a plate of honey in the comb, and a basin of some rich creamy compound; to say nothing of a cold joint of savoury Highland mutton, and a huge uncut cheese. George thought with a friendly regret that Allan Grale would scarcely fare so well.

As if she read his thoughts, the elder lady said, in her slow, stately English, spoken with precision like a foreign tongue—

"We are sorry your friend deserted you. And we hope that he will not be disappointed in finding quarters and be forced to return. But we heard this evening that some foreign travellers had taken

possession of the hotel, and that there would be no more accommodation for anybody till they were gone."

"It may be only a rumour, Janet," said the farmer, Hector McOrist. The solemn demeanour of the old couple almost overawed George. Kind they certainly were; kind in word and in act; but they spoke and moved with the grave dignity of princes.

"A storm is rising, observed the nephew, Colin Vass, but it won't break for two or three hours yet; so your friend will be settled either here or there by that time."

"Ah, I thought the wind must be rising," said George: "for somebody or something knocked sharply at my door while I was upstairs. I opened it and could see nothing—so it may have been the wind."

He could not understand the effect of this simple speech. Everybody turned to gaze fixedly at him as he uttered it, and then they looked at each other. The mother gave a low wailing sound; which, it occurred to George, must be like the first note of a Highland "keen." Old Hector McOrist moved across the floor with a heavy, measured step, and closed the door of the apartment, hitherto open. The action was common-place enough, but George felt that it had a significant bearing on some inner thought. As for the young man, Colin, as he turned suddenly and moved nearer the fire, he uttered a short exclamation, seemingly of irritation and impatience. Whereupon his uncle looked towards him and, with harsh dignity of manner, spoke a few words in Gaelic. As for Morna, she sat perfectly motionless, her pale face visibly paler.

George wondered whether he had unwarily touched the key of some family skeleton cupboard. He tried to divert their thoughts.

"I suppose the scenery of your loch is about as romantic as any in Scotland," he said, "and it interests the imagination. In some of the lonely glens we have come through to-day, it really seemed quite easy to believe in fairies and witches."

"Even you, coming from different scenes and associations, could feel that?" said Colin Vass, half-interrogatively. "Well, can you wonder at the effect produced by those glens on those shut up in them from generation to generation? It is impossible for us to shake off their influence."

Morna said something softly to her cousin—so softly that George could not be sure whether she spoke English or Gaelic—and glanced towards her father.

"The noblest races, the races which have ruled the world," said George, "have come from hill countries. Therefore, if such races have a stronger consciousness of the unseen than others, would it not be wiser to inquire whether this may not be one of the roots of their greatness, rather than rashly to pronounce it their sole weakness?"

The aged Highland man held out his hand to George. "You speak well," he said. "You come from the south, and have seen much, and, doubtless, have its learning and its graces. I will speak

no more against the colleges, as I have done since Colin came back."

Colin's handsome face flushed.

"I suppose some of the ancient faiths still linger in these quiet corners," said George, "though tourists, rushing through from hotel to hotel, may scarcely imagine it. Have you, yourselves, ever known anyone possessing the far-famed Highland gift of second sight?"

They did not seem to notice his question; at least, it remained unanswered. Morna sat absolutely motionless, and George fancied that her father stole a glance towards her. Colin's lip curled.

"At any rate, there are plenty of witches," he said: "but even those are dying out."

"Colin," said Morna, speaking English in her sweet, quiet voice, "do you remember Elspeth Ross, the old henwife? and how she always said that she saw a dead man standing upright beside the bridge that crosses the Vossie, between this and the hotel? And do you remember how many accidents took place there? All the accidents on the road were at that spot, though there was nothing in itself to account for this. And you know, Colin, when the new bridge was made, that the men, digging, found a skeleton ——"

"With all the clothing on, and the bony hands clenched," observed her mother. "And it is buried in the graveyard, with the story of its finding graven on the stone."

Oh, I remember all about it!" said Colin. "I remember the tales of that Elspeth Ross."

There was a moment's silence. "Then there is the well," resumed Morna, very softly.

"Aye, there is the well!" echoed her father, with a world of bitter meaning in his voice.

"There is the well," repeated Colin, quite coolly. "You may have heard, sir, that on an island in the middle of our loch, there is a marvellous well?"

"I think I have," replied George Vivian. "And of some verses written in its honour."

"There have been many such," remarked Colin. "Its reputation was, that if an insane or melancholy person drank of its water, the disease left him."

"I have seen people who were so cured," said the old farmer. "It was a famous well. Pilgrims came from far and near, great folks some of them. In those days the lairds around came of good Celtic blood. We had no rich upstarts then, going to law with each other about ancient boundaries, and turning away the widow and the fatherless, to house their dogs and horses in their stead."

"That's all quite true," assented Colin, warmly. "Many good things vanished with the old days: and I'm not going to defend Mr. Weatherfield, or anything that he did."

"Who is Mr. Weatherfield?" asked George Vivian.

"A person who bought the neighbouring estate of Appleton," Colin answered. "A London man; I don't know what he is exactly, but he is very rich, and is a director of railway companies and the like."

"I can understand the sort of person," said their guest. "And what did he do?"

"Well, he made fun of the famous well, and scoffed at the people for believing in it. And at last, one day, when he had a picnic on the island, to show his contempt for the whole thing, he threw his pet puppy into the water."

"The well dried up there and then, and has remained dry ever since," said the farmer, with impressive solemnity.

"That is really so," added Colin. "But for other wonders and superstitions that live amongst us ——"

"This is neither the time nor the place to talk of them," interrupted his uncle.

There was a silence. George felt that the conversation had better be changed again.

"I fear I am keeping you from your slumbers," he said, politely. "I wonder if there is any possibility of my unlucky friend's returning? I am quite prepared to keep watch for him alone, if you allow me."

"I think we will go to rest," said the mistress of the house; who, mostly silent herself, had been closely observant of her husband and daughter. "Colin will gladly remain up with you."

But, before they retired, the master summoned the serving maiden and the shepherd—the other man who had been in the boat—for household worship. For the benefit of these, this was conducted in Gaelic, but an English Bible with metrical Psalms was put into George's hands, and he knew that their wild plaintive lilting expressed the words, which, heard there and then, seemed full of vivid significance.

"The lofty mountains shall bring forth
Unto the people peace;
Likewise the little hills the same
Shall do by righteousness."

Amid the bustle of the family's retirement, the young Highlander noticed that his guest looked wistfully towards the door. The heat of the low room, grateful enough at first, had grown oppressive.

"You feel the room close, I fear," said Colin courteously. "If you are sufficiently rested, perhaps you may like a few minutes' turn in front of the house? We shall but see your friend the sooner if he is coming back."

Young Vivian gladly assented, and they went out. Except for the light streaming from the windows and doors of the house, all was the blackness of darkness. It was, of course, cooler outside than within, but it was close enough.

"There is thunder at hand," observed Colin.

George could not help thinking of the conjecture by which he had

accounted for the knock on his bedroom door. There certainly was not a breath of wind astir now.

"I don't know how I can thank you enough for all your kindness to an utter stranger," he said. "And what an interesting life you must have here."

"Probably you would find it rather dull, if taken all the year round," answered Colin, quietly, with a slight emphasis on the personal pronoun.

"Dull!" echoed George, "why, my dear fellow, you have far more romance and 'life' amid these solitudes than is possible to the dwellers in great cities. But I was afraid that something I said did not please your aunt and uncle."

"It was not your fault," said Colin. "You could not know what you were doing."

"To tell you the whole truth," George went on, in his charming confidential manner, "I thought afterwards I must have opened out on one of your quaint, poetic superstitions."

"They are not superstitions to those who believe them," said Colin with the same grave manner: "they are terrible realities. Nay, they are terrible realities to some who do not altogether believe them—like me. Terrible—in their results."

"You give me a curious creeping sensation," said George.

"It is not to be wondered at," Colin went on. "For you may consider that to-night you have received a sign from a spirit-hand."

George Vivian stood still. "That knock!" he exclaimed.

"That knock," assented the young Scotchman. "You have told me nothing about it: I will describe it as it should be, and you will say whether I am right. It was one heavy thud upon your door—such a blow as might be given by a shepherd's crook."

"Exactly," answered Mr. Vivian.

"It is a tradition among the McOrists," narrated Colin, as they took another turn, "that a McOrist was, by chance, a guest among the Macdonalds of Glencoe on the night of their massacre by the Campbells. That night, his wife at home in her own house not far from this, heard that sound. Ever since, where it has been heard, it is held as the presage of misfortune—of doom hanging over the hope of the house where it sounded."

"And in this case the hope is——?"

"My cousin Morna," said Colin, with a forced quietness. "Now you can understand what an effect such superstitions may have—and why I combat them, as I do, so resolutely!" he added, bitterly.

"Could I have dreamed of such a thing, I would have died rather than mention it," spoke the young man. "O, might not you have checked me? I think I should have heeded the least sign!"

"I could not. It was too late."

"And has it been heard often, and is it always right?" came the next forlorn enquiry.

"It has been heard several times: it is said to be always right," Colin answered. "There are McOrists who die without having heard it. It has always come unexpectedly for the young and the vigorous, those whom our people call 'the desired.' It is said to be always heard on the day when the end begins."

George made no answer.

"There is one thing special about its occurrence this time," Colin went on presently: "I have never before heard of the knock coming to a stranger—to one not of McOrist blood, or allied by marriage. You have no McOrist blood?" he asked abruptly.

The proud Highlander did not fear to put the plain question, simple mountaineer as he was, though he could recognise in his guest every trait of a gentleman of polite breeding and fortune.

"No," George Vivian answered pondering. "No, certainly not, as far as I can tell—and I know a good deal about my family tree for many generations."

"I must dwell upon that," said Colin, emphatically. "It will weigh more with them than any amount of reasoning. Only my cousin Morna is a singular girl," went on the simple-hearted young Highlander. "She seems but half in this world. She had some strange dream last night; she said so at breakfast; and all the morning, I saw her keep leaving the house and stand gazing over the loch. And when we were in the boat, she would scarcely speak—but seemed always listening. And I believe that was how she heard your call. I don't know how I can speak of such things to a stranger, but after your hearing that knock—whatever it be—you seem like one of ourselves."

"Hurrah!" shouted a cheerful voice out of the darkness. It was Allan Grale, pelting along. "I was afraid I should find myself shut out here, too, and have to knock you up. The hotel is all absorbed by some foreign potentate, but the landlady made me have supper in her own parlour, and lent me dry shoes and stockings, which I am to return to-morrow when we take our seats in the early coach. So we must be up sharp and bright, Vivian. I vote we turn in at once."

Allan's cavalier manner jarred upon George Vivian after the simple stateliness of the McOrists. The young Highlander, the acquaintance of two or three hours, had come nearer to George's inner life than ever had Allan Grale, his old neighbour and familiar comrade.

But Colin Vass did not seem to resent the easy way in which the young Englishman took possession of his kindness. He went with them to their bedroom door and bade them Good-night with great cordiality, looking straight into George's eyes as he did so. They found that another bed had been made up in readiness for Allan's possible return, and the young man looked round and pronounced everything "awfully jolly." But not one word of the strange incident which had befallen him, nor of his subsequent conversation with his host, did George say to his companion. He was in bed first and sank down luxuriously into its snowy depths.

"I think," said he, speaking dreamily, as people often do when their innocent-sounding words have some close link with a deep and secret thought of their own souls, "I think that this would be the very place to seek rest in, if one's life had something in it out of the common run —that sort of misfortune or mystery which the idle world delights to peck and carp at. The people have high minds and simple hearts. If I had made some kind of mistake, even if one had committed a crime, they would never suspect it until they knew—and if they knew, I think they still could pardon."

Allan Grale heard the words, heedlessly, almost unwittingly. Little did he suspect when and where they would return upon him!

CHAPTER III.

WHAT COULD IT MEAN?

EVEN through the storm that presently arose, the young men slept the deep sleep of youth and health and weariness. Colin Vass, accustomed to early hours, called them in the morning, and when, after their hasty toilet, they descended to the parlour, they found an ample breakfast already spread. The barefooted serving maiden was in attendance, but of the family Colin alone was present.

"My uncle is aged, and my aunt is feeble," he said, as if in indirect apology for their absence. "They depute many of their duties to me, and I have to fill their place in the best way I can."

Breakfast over, Colin said he would walk with them to the point where the bye-path of Ragan joined the main road. As they passed out of the house, George Vivian turned and looked back at it. Nobody was to be seen. Only one little casement was set wide open, and its dainty muslin curtain fluttered in the morning breeze. Surely that was Morna's chamber, and she must be already astir! George felt a twinge of wonder why she had not come out to say Good-bye.

He could not guess that last night Morna's mother had stood by her daughter's bedside, speaking in a voice of terrified love.

"Child, who can say what is meant by this that has happened this evening? A stranger has heard the warning that has hitherto been kept for the McOrists. The voice of my heart says, 'Beware of that stranger.'"

Morna lay silent.

"Perhaps," her mother went on, "he was permitted to hear that knock, and unwittingly to tell us about it, that we might understand that danger approached you through him!"

"Mother!" cried Morna with maidenly sense of insult.

"We know not how it might come," went on Mrs. McOrist, laying her hand on her daughter's head; "but we know it cannot signify to you either way; therefore see him not again before he departs. Your

father and I will keep our room, too, so that he may mark no significance in your absence. We should not do this if we felt not deeply," she added. "The head of the McOrists is not wont to leave the deoch an dorius* to be handed over his threshold even by his nearest kinsmen."

"Of course, I shall do as you wish, mother," said Morna, meekly.

And then the eagle-faced woman, her proud reserve breaking down, had caught the slight girl in passionate arms, crying:

"Heart of our life—our last, our loveliest! we could not give you up! We could not spare you, either to life or to death. A home in a stranger's land seems a roof less kindly than even the green sods of our own glen. But what am I saying?—Ochone! Ochone!"

With one convulsive clasp, which Morna returned as warmly, but more gently, she quitted the room.

The girl fell back on her pillow exhausted. Her slight frame was as ill fitted to meet gusts of emotion as it was to encounter the thunderstorm then raging round the house.

"How glad I am I did not tell my mother all my dream!" she sighed. "I fear I did tell her almost too much. But she does not allude to it now. Can it have slipped from her mind, or does she remember it only too well?"

There was little more sleep for Morna that night. When George Vivian looked back at Ragan next morning, she was seated in her chamber, fully dressed, but out of sight. Morna was not a girl to peep. But when the voices of the travellers retreated until they passed quite out of hearing, when she knew they must have reached the highway, then she rose and stood full in the casement. Her cousin Colin was already returning towards Ragan; and hastening down the road which wound like a white thread round the green robes of the hills, she could see two figures. She watched for a moment, and then went downstairs to meet Colin.

"Then the other gentleman did come back last night!"

"Yes," said Colin, "but you did not miss anything in not entertaining him. He is quite a commonplace young tourist. The McOrist ghost would not have interfered with him," he added, with a forced laugh.

Morna raised her blue eyes to her cousin's face, and said nothing.

Meantime the two young travellers sped cheerily on their way. George Vivian might feel that he would like to go back to Ragan some day, but at present he only wanted to reach the Highland Capital, where he expected that letters were awaiting him. He had been a little nervous before about what news those letters might bring; and somehow that mysterious knock had not made him less anxious. Certainly he had not the precise, unreasoning faith of the Highlanders themselves, but he had a feeling that there was "something at the bottom of these things and that one never knew what it might be.

They arrived at the hotel in plenty of time to make all their arrange

* A parting attention. *Anglice*, a stirrup cup.

ments comfortably, and were soon bowling along, behind two good horses. The morning was lovely, the scenery through which they drove was alternately savagely grand and smilingly beautiful. At a certain point they left their conveyance, and caught a train which speedily took them to the town for which they were both longing. It had historic and picturesque interests of its own, but they both meant to leave it as soon as they had got their letters.

These were soon secured. Allan had only two, neither of which seemed of absorbing interest to him, though his face was none the brighter when he had read them. George had three or four: one a thick budget directed in a lady's free, elegant writing, on which Allan Grale cast a wistful eye, for it was from George's sister, Maria Vivian. But George himself thrust all his epistles into his pocket for more leisurely perusal—all, save one; a letter superscribed in a straggling Italian hand, and with the writing in the inside showing through the common envelope. It did not take long to read, and then a look of vexation and distress settled on the young man's face.

"We must lose no time in getting trains south from this place," said young Vivian. "I must be in London, if possible, to-morrow—I think it can be done by travelling all night."

They had to hurry over their lunch, to catch the train. When seated in it, George composed himself to read his other letters. One or two were insignificant enough, but he read his sister's letter carefully, twice over.

"Nothing but trouble everywhere," was his exclamation. There's my brother home from college, with a grand disappointment of every one of my uncle's ambitions for him. I can't make it out myself. I thought Edgar would distinguish himself highly, and he has not done a single thing. I don't believe that can be the worst of it. Every effect has a cause. There must be something behind."

"Probably," laughed Allan.

"And disappointment makes the old General very irritable. He has been as a father to us, and we have both disappointed him."

"I wonder if my mother and Mary Anne are back at Dering from their visit to Redbourne," observed Allan, after a long silence.

A curious expression, something, as it seemed, between alarm and impatience, flitted across George Vivian's face.

"It was a great mistake that they ever went there," said he.

"I don't see why; any way, it was all your fault," returned Allan. "You came home with such pretty sketches of the place and such loud praises of it, that they picked up the idea of its being a sort of earthly Paradise!"

"And they probably found it only a Sleepy Hollow."

Allan Grale settled himself, drew his cap over his eyes, and dropped asleep. George sat silently for a while, gazing on the beautiful scenery through which they were passing but without seeing it. Presently a sense of weariness stole over him, and he also slept.

He could not tell how long he slept—only a few minutes, it seemed, and yet when he woke with a sudden start, everything around had strangely changed. The very character of the country was different—the mountains lay far away, a dim blue line, beyond reaches of field and pasture land. The glare of the sun was softened too, and the trees cast long shadows.

The train was stopping at a small station. One or two country people were getting in and out. The railway porter went to and fro, shouting an unintelligible word. George leaned out of the window.

"Are we near Perth?" he asked.

"Perth!" echoed the porter, coming to the door and opening it: "You're all wrong for Perth, sir. You ought to have changed into a main-line carriage long ago."

"Eh! what's up?" cried Allan, waking in confusion.

"If you're going to get out, better make haste, sir; train moving on," warned the porter.

They bundled up their traps, and obeyed. The train moved off slowly, leaving them behind, disconsolate enough.

"Awkward mistake, gentlemen," said the station-master, civilly, taking in the situation. "There are big notices printed on the platforms where you ought to change, and the officials do their best too—but at this time of year, sir, things are hurried and irregular."

"We were sound asleep, having been much fatigued yesterday," said George. "What's to be done? First of all—where are we?"

"At Savoch," answered the station-master.

"Savoch!" echoed Allan Grale, surprised, but with something like recognition in his voice. "How can we get from here to Perth?"

"You can't get to Perth from here at all," said the station-master "You will have to go back to the junction."

"And when can we do that?"

"Not before seven o'clock to-morrow morning," answered the man, promptly. "There's a train runs then from here to catch the early train going south. I expect that's what you want," he added, civilly.

"George groaned. "Yes," he said, "but we wanted the train to-night, to reach London to-morrow morning."

The station-master was silent. He did not need to utter the unpleasant words, "It cannot be done." Facts could say that for themselves.

"We shall get in to-morrow afternoon, and be at Dering by the evening," said Allan, who was in no particular hurry to bring his holiday to an end.

"Then there's nothing for us but to put up here for the night," returned George, turning on his heel with a disappointed air.

"And I'll take you where to put up," said Allan, eagerly. "Will you believe it, Vivian, that I have an aunt in this very place? I was here once before, ages ago, when I was a little fellow."

"Well, that is a strange coincidence," exclaimed George, brightening

into a better humour, though his eyebrows were still knit. "It is a wonder you did not think before of paying her a visit, when you were so near. I could have gone on alone, you know."

"One night of it, even with you to take care of me, will be quite enough," nodded Allan. "The Gibsons are dreadfully dismal, stiff people. And I'm not quite sure whether my paying a formal visit would be quite approved of at home, you know; but my mother will be glad enough to get news in this accidental way."

"They are her own relatives, I suppose?"

"Yes. Mrs. Gibson is my mother's sister," explained Allan, as they tramped along the flat road between dreary stone dykes. "Her husband is the parish schoolmaster; he is a university man, and when she married him, he was intending to enter the Church—the Scotch Church, of course. Of the two sisters, my aunt was then believed to have made the better match. I think my mother made my father feel it so at the time. I know he has constantly reminded her since that it was a mistake."

"Was your uncle never ordained?"

"I really don't know," Allan admitted. "I think I've seen a card with 'Reverend' on it, so I suppose he must have been. But I fancy he never succeeded in getting a church for himself. There's the house," broke off Allan. "We have not lost ourselves this time."

It was impossible to imagine a scene more different from that of the previous evening. The minister's house—for George supposed he must be one, though he might not have a church of his own—was a grey square block, standing on one side of the road, facing the school, an oblong grey block on the other. One tree, stunted in growth and scant of foliage, stood beside the house, and flat turnip fields closed around the low wall which enclosed the little garden. One shuddered to think what the scene must be when skies were lowering, and earth was dank. For it looked unutterably common and dreary, even in the magic light of the early summer evening. As they drew near, George's artist-eye saw that the dismal scene was not without its appropriate human figure. At the gate, set in the low stone wall, stood a tall man, clad in black, his iron grey hair uncovered. He was looking down the road towards them, shading his eyes with his hand.

"This is my uncle," whispered Allan: and George thought that this grim old gentleman seemed looking out for the travellers, even as the sweet maiden, Morna McOrist, had seemed listening for them.

Allan stepped forward and took the schoolmaster's hand, hastily introducing himself. The hand was almost withheld, and the weatherbeaten face was kept suspiciously closed until that self-introduction was fully made out. Even then the welcome was not warm.

"A friend of yours," Mr. Gibson asked, turning to George.

"Yes; my fellow traveller, and a very great friend of mine in Dering," Allan replied.

"Well," said the old gentleman in a resigned tone, "well, we'll do our best for you. The wife was baking scones this morning."

He led the way into the house, stopping in the little hall. "Marget —Marget!" he called out; here's somebody to see you."

Marget obeyed with undue haste for her weary and toil-worn face and frame. She gave a strange little moan when she saw Allan, whom she seemed to recognise at once, probably from family resemblances. The hand she held out to George Vivian visibly trembled.

"And how were all when you left them?" she asked of her nephew. "My poor sister! I suppose we are never to see each other again in this world."

"Oh, don't say that! who knows?" said Allan. "You ought to run up to London some day, and see her, and all the sights."

"You don't live in London now."

"Dering is not so far away from it. But I think my mother would wonder what you had been doing to yourself. I'm afraid she would deny she was the elder. She goes in for being quite a smart young lady yet, I can tell you."

Mrs. Gibson shook her head ruefully. "She looks well, does she?" she said. "Ah, well, things are different with different people, and I think she took everything easier than I did, always."

"Marget," said her husband, in his grim, grave way, "hadn't you better tell the girl to be preparing some food."

His wife hastened to obey, in her tremulous, frightened manner. "Does the girl know anybody is here?" she asked. "I did not hear you knock."

"I think my uncle was looking out for us!" said Allan lightly: "he was watching at the gate. But I suppose the coming in of that train is the event of the day here."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Gibson; but though she hastened out of the room on her hospitable errand, George saw that her eyes, filled with tears from their first meeting, had at last overflowed.

George thought that the austere schoolmaster might probably offer some kindly apology for his wife's evident nervousness. But no. He ignored it altogether, and began to discuss some knotty ecclesiastical point that was evidently exercising the local mind. He kept up this style of conversation through the meal, which consisted of the simplest viands, plainly served on common stoneware. The table napery was full of darns, the silver worn to a mere wafer. Life at Savoch was evidently lived out in grinding penury.

After they had finished their repast, a stroll through the village was proposed. There was little to be seen—a few sordid cottages, a commonplace farm, and one mysterious cairn; out of whose historical uncertainty, Mr. Gibson managed to make a great deal of talk. The uncle and nephew took the lead. George fell behind with Mrs. Gibson, who for the most part was silent. They returned home, by the barn-like church, standing in its dismal graveyard. But here,

Mrs. Gibson, stepping a little nearer to George, and speaking in a whisper, pointed to a heavy slab of grey stone.

"That's my Lizzie's grave: our daughter's."

She looked up at him with her faded eyes as if she could not help craving for sympathy, even from a stranger. But there were no tears in them now.

"How sad! Your life would have been so much brighter if she had lived," said George, kindly.

The little woman shook her head slightly. "Perhaps it was best for her to go. I've never wished her back: but I have often wished myself with her. I know it's wrong. I wouldn't dare even say so to Mr. Gibson."

That little revelation of human pain and patience made George look with compassionate eyes on the bare home when they returned to it. It gave an undertone of pathos to the dreary "family worship," to which Mr. Gibson invited them with the grim words that he supposed "they would not mind joining in it for once." But even though the chapter chosen was from the Minor Prophets, though the prayer was little but a dry statement of doctrine, and though the psalm was read, and not sung, there was yet something in the whole scene which touched George Vivian's sensitive temperament.

He was early astir next morning. But Mrs. Gibson was up before him, seconding the domestic labours of her very rough "girl," who did not seem half so efficient as the barefooted, Gaelic-speaking handmaiden of Ragan. The breakfast table was set, the big Bible placed beside the "master's" cup. He had not yet appeared. And his wife went bustling in and out, tremulous, rueful and apologetic.

George turned about for something to interest him while he waited. There was the Bible; a large, leather-bound one; and he opened it.

The blank page at the beginning was headed simply by the names of Alexander Gibson and Margaret Burn. Then followed a date, presumably that of their marriage. Below came some ruled lines. On the first was written "Elizabeth Gibson, with the date of her birth. This name was repeated lower on the page, in fresher ink, with the date of her death, showing that she had passed way in her young womanhood.

But the singular thing was that between these two simple family entries, a space had been carefully and evenly cut out.

What could it mean? Could some mere clerical error, made perhaps in faltering grief, have caused such a complete excision?

Or—but George hastily closed the book. For a hand was on the door. It was the master of the house himself, speedily followed by the mistress, and presently by Allan.

Again, the solemn worship, again the plain, poor meal; but now to George's sense of the pathetic, was added that of the mysterious, the tragic. Was it something more than poverty, and sorrow and loneliness, which had graved the deep lines upon the elderly faces before him? And if there was a household story, did Allan Grale know it?

They had no time to lose. Their breakfast was hasty and their farewell brief. Mrs. Gibson sent many loving messages to her sister, and added some more for her brother-in-law and niece. And while she spoke with tremulous eagerness, she looked fervently into her nephew's face, as if there was something else she longed to say, but could not, and as if she hoped she might catch there some response to her unspoken longing. George thought Allan seemed glad to get away.

He gave a sigh of relief as they hurried down the road. "They are quite too awful," he said. "I knew they were queer, but I never thought they could be as bad as this."

"I am sure they were most kind and hospitable," affirmed George Vivian.

Could he tell Allan what he had chanced to see, and ask if it had any meaning? No. If it had any significance it must concern some private incident of family history.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BLACK POOL.

A SWEET sunny English valley spreading far around—a belt of rich woodland—a smooth-shaven lawn in front of a rambling white house, against which two magnificent cedars stand out in bold relief.

This is the Court, Dering, where General and Mrs. Vivian live, which is the home of their niece, Maria, and the head-quarters of her two brothers, George and Edgar.

There is quite a circle in the drawing-room, for the Vivians have afternoon callers. The General stands in the centre of the hearth-rug. He is a little man, with hair which seems inclined to stand upright, a florid complexion, a fierce voice, and kind eyes. Mrs. Vivian is a large, fair woman, with a softly critical manner. "A gentle-spoken lady," the poor peasantry called her. Her nephew George had once said "that his uncle barked and his aunt bit."

"And so, Mrs. Grale, Mary Anne tells me you did not really enjoy Redbourne?" she was saying, sweetly, to her guest, a stout, short-breathed middle-aged lady in very thick silks and voluminous laces.

"No, indeed I did not," said Mrs. Grale, emphatically. For this was Allan's mother, truly little like her worn-out shabby sister in Savoch school-house! She and her daughter had just returned from a short visit to a lovely New Forest village, to which they had been attracted by sketches and accounts brought back by George Vivian, who had sojourned there previously. "As I said to Mary Anne, I did not see it was one bit prettier than Dering, and we might as well have stayed at home and never gone for a change at all. And a great deal better too; for pay what one may, one never gets a hired house like one's own place."

"No, no; always imposed upon!" interjected the General.

"I did not suppose Redbourne would be prettier than Dering," observed Mrs. Vivian. "But surely accommodation was to be had!"

"Oh the house we took was decent enough," admitted Mrs. Grale. "It was the village doctor's. You know the sort of thing in that style of dwelling: very little carpet on the bedroom floors and ——"

"Maria, may I send in my cup for a little more milk?" So spoke up the clear voice of a young lady at the other side of the room. Probably she thought it as well to remind Mrs. Grale that she and her sister were present—Lettice and Agnes Palmer. For their father was a doctor, the only doctor at Dering, and their house was exactly of the type Mrs. Grale was decrying.

Mrs. Vivian laughed softly. "My dear Mrs. Grale," she said, "can't you go in sometimes for plain living and high thinking—just for a little change. For my part, I'm always too delighted to get rid of all the sort of thing which one has had all one's life," she added, as if she herself were quite prepared to be a shepherdess.

"I'm sure the house was very nice, mamma," put in Mary Anne Grale; "and Redbourne was pretty enough. It was Mr. George Vivian's pictures which did all the mischief," she added with a smile. "He must have put all the poetry of his own nature into those sketches: and when we went to the places by ourselves, of course we did not find the poetry there!"

Miss Mary Anne Grale was a tall young person, very fashionable, with a small waist, tight gloves and a long train.

"And Redbourne really is dull," she went on, addressing herself to Edgar Vivian, in attendance at his sister's tea-table. "How on earth your brother endured it for the weeks upon weeks that he stayed there, I cannot imagine."

"Ah, but he has his sketching as a perpetual resource," said Edgar: "and then he comes across all sorts of quaint characters. George never lacks interest or amusement."

"It was odd that we did not hear of him at all," mused Mary Anne aloud. "I asked ever so many of the villagers whether they knew a Mr. Vivian, but they did not."

"It is not likely you would encounter the same sort of people. Or they might not understand your description," suggested Edgar. "You would call him Mr. Vivian, a gentleman, or perhaps an artist, while George's acquaintances there would probably know him as 'a painting chap.'"

"But I did come across plenty of people who knew about 'the painting chaps,' as I must own they did call them," laughed Mary Anne. "Still, none of them knew of a Mr. Vivian. They would ask me if I did not mean Mr. This or Mr. That: especially they were always asking if I was quite sure I did not mean a Mr. Forester, who seems to have been quite a favourite among them; and by the stories they told of his sayings and doings must be a great character

—a gentleman-amateur, I suppose, for he seemed by their accounts to have scattered his money about freely."

"And did not even all these stories and incidents compensate for the absence of a pier and a promenade?" asked Agnes Palmer.

Agnes Palmer was a small slight girl, with soft waving hair, a well poised head, and rapid, bird-like movements. There was a dash of scorn in her voice as she spoke. Her elder sister Lettice gave her a glance, half of surprise, half of entreaty; Edgar Vivian turned towards her with a sunny smile. He was glad to hear her speak—she had been so silent all this afternoon. It was the first time he had seen her since he came down from College—and he and she had used to be such friends.

She did not look at him now. She looked straight past him at Mary Anne Grale, who returned the gaze with a sudden stony hardness settling on her handsome, smiling face.

"It is possible to have beautiful scenery and really interesting society together with all the amenities of holiday civilization," said Mary Anne haughtily. "Of course they have to be sought for, and are not at everybody's command. If one had only a choice between a crowded watering place and a dull village like Redbourne, I don't know which one might choose."

Maria Vivian came to the rescue. She felt there was jarring around her; a thing she always strove to put a stop to. She was not very pretty, but she had a sweet, interesting face. Some sadness seemed to have been upon her latterly, and she had grown pale and thin. "There are few of those wonderful places, which combine town and country," she said, in her kind way.

"O, by the way!" exclaimed Mary Anne Grale, eagerly, "the only sensation we had at Redbourne was connected with an old country inn. It made me feel as if we were in the middle of a three volume novel! I dare say you have heard Mr. George speak of the old inn there, the Ash-Tree."

"I think so," said Maria. "I fancy George took a sketch of it."

"It is more of a farm than an inn," explained Miss Grale; "the old host takes quite a pride in his sheep and poultry. I think he keeps up his sign for a little rustic sociability, more than to invite custom. But I must tell you. It appears that this old host of the Ash-Tree, Joseph Raynham, had a pretty niece, and this pretty niece had been spoiled, and the clever young artists had turned her head, especially the artist who was talked of so much, Mr. Forester. It came to the uncle's knowledge that they were sometimes seen roaming the forest together, and he spoke to his niece. She was not used to be found fault with, and she and the old man quarrelled more than once over it. Finally she ran away."

"Ran away!" exclaimed Mrs. Vivian. "Do you mean ran away really? Did she not run back again?"

"She had not when we left Redbourne. She could not be traced, or heard of. The place was in a commotion over it."

"What was her name?" asked the General. "Had Mr. Forester run away also?"

"Oh, he had left weeks before—at least, I know it was some time before," replied Mary Anne. "I am not sure that he was suspected of being implicated. Her name, sir?—it was Rose Raynham."

Mrs. Grale was rising to depart. "I want to be at home by the time the train comes in," she explained. "It may, you know, General, bring the travellers."

They said adieu and went out to their carriage, and drove away to their home, Moorland House. Mrs. Grale could never become quite at ease behind the fiery steeds with which her husband kept her supplied. Her own pet ambition had been a pony chaise, and nothing more; but, like many ambitions, it had overtopped itself, and she had got more than she had bargained for!

The Miss Palmers did not linger. Edgar Vivian said he would walk part of the way with them. Lettice Palmer was pleased, and showed her pleasure. But his old friend, Agnes, was stubbornly indifferent. And as they went along, she left the conversation to Lettice.

"I'm afraid this return of mine to Dering will not be very merry," he said, in a low voice. "My uncle is terribly grieved that I have not done well at Oxford."

"Of course, he is," said Agnes, coldly. "Everybody is grieved."

"But misfortunes will befall the best of students," put in good-natured Lettice.

"I know I have not been at my best," said Edgar, frankly. "I did very little good work last term. It is not always altogether our own fault. The affairs of our friends sometimes—" he hesitated. His defence of himself was drawing him farther than he had intended.

"Our friends," repeated Agnes Palmer. "'Friend' is a very sacred word with some people; but with others it ——"

She stopped abruptly, and Edgar Vivian winced. And the two did not speak again for the rest of the walk.

"I will not go in with you now," he said when they reached Dr. Palmer's. "I think I shall stroll to the railway station, on the chance that that wandering brother of mine and Grale may turn up."

Wishing them good evening, Edgar Vivian made his way to the dull little railway station. The train from London was nearly due, but no Dering people seemed to be awaiting it. One or two working men were there, and a woman of rather superior class.

Edgar's attention was particularly drawn to that woman. He could not tell why; unless it was that her cloak attracted him. It was a long dust mantle of a bright, deep, glaring yellow colour. She herself was of middle height and approaching middle age. Her complexion was dark, tawny; and her regular features were well-marked and

indicative of decision, energy, and perhaps of something rarer than either—determination. Indeed, this characteristic-struck Edgar, who was not a particularly acute observer, and he thought it seemed as if she had some magnetic power to draw his gaze upon her.

Edgar Vivian did not really expect the travellers; therefore, when the train rushed in and he saw them leaning from a carriage window, it was in a way a surprise. Eagerly he rushed forward to greet them.

"All well, I suppose," cried Allan, alighting. "Then here, Vivian, you and I will say good-bye," he added, speaking to George. "The porters will divide our luggage, and send it home after us."

Had the young men looked back in leaving the station, they would have seen that slight, yellow-cloaked woman come out of the waiting-room, go up to their luggage, and take a swift survey of the tickets adhering thereto. These afforded no bad chart of the journeying just completed by two of them. Surely she did not find what she had expected! For she stood, disappointed and irresolute. "I must go straight back again!" she then said, and hurried out of the station.

But somebody had been watching her. This was a young railway porter; and he followed her to the railing, and looked after her, as she went off swiftly down the road, without one backward glance.

"What were you looking after?" asked a fellow workman.

"At that yellow woman, who has been hanging about here this evening," he answered. "I can't make her out. There's that about her that makes one feel something is up somewhere."

Meanwhile Allan reached home. A strange gloom had fallen on him during his short walk from the station to his father's house. Perhaps it might be but that sense of blank which we have all experienced on parting from one with whom we have lived in close companionship for many days. Perhaps it was the dropping off of the careless holiday self and the resumption of ordinary cares and anxieties. But could these be very heavy for such as Allan Grale?

He found his mother and Mary Anne just sitting down to dinner. His father was not there: no uncommon occurrence, but to-day it seemed to fret Mrs. Grale, because she thought it might mean more trouble at the counting-house—there had been a good deal of trouble lately, she told her son. Of course, she did not know what about—Mr. Grale never told her such things, as Allan knew—but she fancied some dishonesty had been discovered, to which no clue could be obtained. Anyway, it was disturbing his father.

Mary Anne kept interrupting her mother with inquiries concerning George Vivian, his sayings and his doings.

When dinner was over, Allan expressed his intention of taking a little stroll, and went out. His legs wanted a stretch after the cramping railway journey, he carelessly remarked to his mother and sister.

He walked away swiftly, striking off by unfrequented ways towards a wild and lonely spot, which, as a rule, Dering did not favour. In fact Dering shunned it, especially at this the dusk hour. The place

had one dark legend attaching to it; all the darker because its facts were lost in the mists of centuries, and fancy was left to supply their place. But, however the legend might vary—it was always a story of violent death and undying remorse. And the scene was ever the Black Pool.

Some people—Allan Grale had been among them—did not believe in the legend at all. They thought that the loneliness and weirdness of the Black Pool itself had put the story into some old romancer's head, and thence it had been handed down.

Truly, the Black Pool was an eerie spot! And it could never have looked more weird than it did on this the evening of Allan's return to Dering. The rich autumn moonlight, so bright and yellow that it seemed like sunshine bewitched of its genial warmth, lay on the deep, dark water which so well deserved the name it bore—the Black Pool. Around it the turf rose gently, thickly dotted with clusters of bracken and clumps of bramble, and a little farther back, completely encircling it, stood rows of giant trees, their trunks grey with the moss of ages. They stood around, gazing down upon the Black Pool, like relentless spectators in an amphitheatre. If the Black Pool had a story, they knew it. If it had a secret, they kept it. Only one among them, wrenched by some sudden storm, stretched skyward a black and blasted bough.

Allan Grale was not sensitive to external influences. He came here because he wanted to be alone. The Black Pool and its horrors had not much horror for him. They had never haunted yet his dreams, waking or sleeping.

Had he ever any waking dreams? And were they ever haunted? What was it that rose before his mind's eye now, so that he did not notice the moonlight on the solemn water, or the black shadow cast by the withered branch?

What filled his thoughts was a scene far different from this gloomy dell—a fair garden scene, in the light of a beautiful evening, early in the summer which is now on the wane. He sees himself standing apart, talking with a fair, graceful girl, who raises her soft eyes to his, as women do to only one. O, he can still hear her voice as it lingered shyly over his name. It is now three or four months since he has heard that voice in its soft accent, but it is ever ringing in his ears.

"Allan—dearest Allan!" He can see her before his eyes—down to every detail of the dress she wore, the clinging black silk with the soft white laces, and the little pearl cross nestling on the ivy leaves upon her bosom. A man does not forget the veriest trifle of the day when the woman he loves promises to be his. For it was on that ever-to-be-remembered summer evening, when the leaves which are now turning golden, had still all the freshness of spring, that Maria Vivian had finally avowed she loved Allan Grale, even as he loved her, and promised to be his wife.

Yet from that evening—that fatal evening as he called it in his thoughts—the two had never met so as to exchange another word!

And yet they had parted then as lovers part. Maria had gone hastily back to the Court with such a glow on her cheek as no summer breeze can give. And she had carried with her a letter which she had persisted in claiming from Allan, seeing that he had told her he had written it for her, in case he found no opportunity for speech with her.

"Give it to me," Maria had said in her frank maidenly surrender. "It shall be my dearest treasure. I cannot bear to lose a single sentence that you wrote and meant for me."

Yes: those were her words: he remembered them, every one. They rose upon his heart now, and smote it so sharply that he sat down on the ground under that blasted tree, and groaned aloud in the solitude.

They had parted thus, he leaving the letter of love behind him. And yet they had never met again: not even by chance—not at church, or on the high road. Chance meetings are not for those who do not part by chance!

He knew what had parted them. And so did she. Nobody else did. Indeed, nobody else dreamed that they had once drawn quite so near, or that they were so far apart now. He could trust her to keep the secret as safely as the grave. But to-night, he had begun to ask himself a question: "If it comes out otherwise, what then?"

"If it comes out!"—He looked up with bewildered eyes and swimming brain. And the moonlight played on the still waters of the Black Pool. Those waters were deep. They might keep a secret too!

Yet somehow the knowledge that Maria Vivian knew the worst already, seemed to hold Allan Grale back from despair. It was as if one in the Gulf of Doom felt an angel watching him, and understood that where those pure eyes could penetrate a way out must still exist.

There was a sudden cry above his head. Allan started up. It was but a belated bird hying to its rest. But it had broken the spell. The young man turned from the solemn regions of remembrance and remorse, back to the chances of fortune and the "what-will-be, will-be," mood of his ordinary life. So, as he hastened homeward, he had his jest ready for the solitary villager he met; and when, entering the drawing-room at home, his mother asked "Where did you take your stroll," he answered, carelessly enough, "Only as far as the Black Pool."

Mrs. Grale shivered. "The Black Pool!" she echoed. "I cannot endure that place; and at this time of night!—to me, it seems cold even in the sunshine. I believe, Allan, it bears the chill of an evil deed."

Did she speak in the light of a prophecy?

(*To be continued.*)

CARAMEL COTTAGE.

THE BARRISTER'S VISIT.

IT was early in August, and we were at Dyke Manor, for the Squire had let us go home from school for the Worcester races. We had joined him at Worcester the previous day, Tuesday, driving home with him in the evening. To-morrow, Thursday, he would drive us over to the course again; to-day, Wednesday, the horses would have rest; and on Friday we must return to school.

Breakfast was over, the Squire gone out, and the few minutes' Bible-reading to us—which Mrs. Todhetley never forgot, though Tod did not always stay in for it, but he did this morning—came to an end. Hannah appeared at the door as she closed the book.

"Miss Barbary's come," ma'am," she said.

"Run, my dear," cried Mrs. Todhetley to Lena.

"I don't want to," said Lena, running to the open window instead, and nearly pitching herself head-foremost through it: upon which Hannah captured her and carried her off.

"Who on earth is Miss Barbary?" questioned Tod. "Any relation to the man at Caramel Cottage?"

"His daughter," said Mrs. Todhetley. "She comes to teach Lena French."

"Hope she's less of a shady character than her father!" was Tod's free comment.

A year or two before this, a stranger had made his appearance at Church Dykely, and put up at the Silver Bear. He was a gentlemanly-looking man of perhaps forty years, tall, slender, agile, with thin, distinguished features, an olive skin, black hair, and eyes of a peculiar shade of deep, steel-blue. People went into raptures over his face, and called it beautiful. And so it was; but to my thinking it had a look in it that was the opposite of beautiful; any way, the opposite of good. They said it was my fancy at home: but Duffham owned to the same fancy. His name, as he wrote it down one day at the Silver Bear, was Pointz Barbary. After a week's stay at the inn, he, finding, I suppose, that the neighbourhood suited him, looked out for a little place to settle down upon, and met with it in Caramel Cottage, a small dwelling near to us, on the property called Caramel's Farm. The cottage was then to be let, and Mr. Barbary went into it.

Some items of his past history came out by degrees; it is hard to say how, for he told none himself. Now and then some former friend or other came to pay him a short visit; and it may be that these strangers talked about him.

Pointz Barbary, a gentleman by descent, and once of fairly good substance, had been a great traveller, had roved pretty nearly all over

the world. The very few relatives he possessed lived in Canada—people of condition, it was said—and his own property (what was left of it) was also there. He had been married twice. First to a young lady in France; her friends (English) having settled there for economy's sake. She died at the end of the year, leaving him a little girl, that the mother's people at once took to. Next he married a Miss Reste, daughter of Colonel Reste, who was in Her Majesty's service. A few years later she also died—died of consumption—leaving him a widower and childless. It's true he had his first wife's daughter, but she lived in France with her mother's sister, so he did not get much benefit from her.

Mr. Barbary was poor. No mistake about that. The interest of his first wife's money brought him in fifty-two pounds yearly, and this he would enjoy till his death, when it went to his daughter. Miss Reste had brought him several thousand pounds; but he and she had lived away, and not a stiver remained of it. His own means had also been spent lavishly; and, so far as was known, he had but the two-and-fifty pounds a-year to live upon at Caramel Cottage, with a chance remittance from Canada now and again.

He made no acquaintance at Church Dykely, and none was made with him. Civilly courteous in a rather grand and haughty way when he met people, so far as a few remarks went, touching the weather or the crops, and similar safe topics, he yet kept the world at a distance. As the time went on it was thought there might be a reason for this. Whispers began to circulate that Mr. Barbary's doings were not orthodox. He was suspected of poaching, both in game and fish, and a strong feeling of shyness grew up against him.

Some few months prior to the present time—August—his daughter came to Caramel Cottage. Her aunt in France was dead, and she had no home henceforth but her father's. That I and Tod had not seen or heard of her until now, was owing to the midsummer holidays having been spent at Crabb Cot. The vacation over, and Mrs. Todhetley back at Dyke Manor, she found herself called upon by Miss Barbary. Hearing that Mrs. Todhetley wished her little girl to begin French, she had come to offer herself as teacher. The upshot was that she was engaged, and came for a couple of hours every morning to drill French into Lena.

"What's she like?" asked Tod of the mother, upon her explaining this. "Long and thin and dark, like Barbary, and disagreeable with a self-contained reticence?"

"She is not the least like him in any way," was Mrs. Todhetley's answer. "She is charmingly simple—good, I am sure, and one of the most open-natured girls I ever met. 'I wish to do it for the sake of earning a little money,' she said to me, when asking to come. 'My dear father is not rich, and if I can help him in ever so small a way I shall be thankful.' The tears almost came into her eyes as she spoke," added Mrs. Todhetley; "she quite won my heart."

"She seems to think great things of that respectable parent of hers!" commented Tod.

"Oh, yes. Whatever may be the truth as to his failings, *she* sees none in him. And, my dears, better that it should be so. She earns a little money of me, apart from teaching Lena," added Mrs. Todhetley.

"What at?" asked Tod. "Teaching *you*?"

The mother shook her head with a smile. "I found out, Joseph, that she is particularly skilful at mending old lace. I have some that needs repair. She takes it home and does it at her leisure—and you cannot imagine how grateful she is."

"How old is she?"

"Nineteen—close upon twenty, I think she said," replied the mother. And there the conversation ended, for Mrs. Todhetley had to go to the kitchen to give the daily orders.

The morning wore on. We went to Church Dykely and were back again by twelve o'clock. Tod had got Don on the lawn, making him jump for biscuit, when the dog rushed off, barking, and we heard a scream. A young lady in a straw hat and a half-mourning cotton dress was running away from him, she and Lena having come out of the house together.

"Come here, Don," said Tod in his voice of authority, which the good Newfoundland dog never disobeyed. "How dare you, sir? Johnny, lad, I suppose that's Miss Barbary."

I had forgotten all about her. A charming girl, as the mother had said, slight and graceful, with a face like a peach blossom, dimpled cheeks, soft light-brown hair and dark-blue eyes. Not the hard, steel-blue eyes that her father had; sweet eyes, these, with a gentle, loving look in them.

"You need not be afraid of the dog," cried Tod, advancing to where she stood, behind the Mulberry tree. "Miss Barbary, I believe?"—lifting his cap.

"Yes," she said in a frank tone, turning her frank face to him; "I am Katrine Barbary. It is a very large dog—and he barks at me."

Large he was, bigger than many a small donkey. A brave, faithful, good-tempered dog, he, and very handsome, his curly white coat marked out with black. Gentle to friends and to respectable strangers, Don was at mortal enmity with tramps and beggars: we could not cure him of this, so he was chained up by day. At night he was unchained to roam the yard at will, but the gate was kept locked. Had he got out, he might have pinned the coat of any loose man he met, but I don't believe he would have bitten him. A good fright Don would give, but not mortal injury. At least, we had never yet known him do that.

Lena ran up in her short pink frock, her light curls flying. "Miss Barbary is always afraid when she hears Don bark," she said to us. "She will not go near the yard; she thinks he'll bite her."

"I will teach you how to make friends with him," said Tod: "though he would never hurt you, Miss Barbary. Come here and pat his head while I hold him; call him by his name gently, 'Don; poor Don; good Don.' Once he knows you, he would protect you from harm with his life."

She complied with ready obedience, though the roses left her cheeks. "There," said Tod, loosing the dog, and letting her pat him at leisure, "see how gentle he is; how affectionately he looks up at you!"

"Please not to think me very silly!" she pleaded earnestly, as if beseeching pardon for a sin. "I have never been used to dogs. We do not keep dogs in France. At least very few people do. Oh, dear!"

Something that she carried in her left hand wrapped in paper had dropped on the lawn. Don pounced upon it. "Oh, please take it from him! please, please!" she cried out in terror. Tod laughed, and extricated the little parcel.

"It has some valuable old lace in it of Mrs. Todhetley's," she explained as she thanked him. "I am taking it home to mend."

"You mend old lace famously, I hear," said Tod, as we walked with her to the entrance gate.

"Yes, I think I do it nearly as well as the nuns who taught me."

"Have you been in a convent?"

"Only for my education. I was an externe—a daily pupil. My aunt lived next door to it. I went every morning at eight o'clock and returned home at six in the evening to supper."

"Did you get no dinner?" asked Tod.

She took the question literally. "I had dinner and collation at school; breakfast and supper at home. That was the way in our town with the externes at the convent. We were Protestants, you see, so my aunt liked me to be at home on Sundays. Thank you for teaching Don to know me: and now I will say good morning to you."

I was holding the gate open for her to pass out, when Ben Gibbon went by, a gun carelessly held over his shoulder. He touched his hat to us, and we gave him a slight nod in reply. Miss Barbary said "Good day, Mr. Gibbon."

Tod drew down his displeased lips. He had already taken a liking to the girl—so had I, for that matter—she was a true lady, and Mr. Ben Gibbon, a brother to the gamekeeper at Chavasse Grange, could not boast of a particularly shining character.

"Do you know *him*, Miss Barbary?" asked Tod. "Be quiet, Don!" he cried to the dog, which had begun to growl when he saw Gibbon.

"He comes to our house sometimes to see papa. Please pardon me for keeping you waiting," she added to me, as I still held back the gate. "That gun is pointed this way and it may go off."

Tod was amused. "You seem to dread guns as much as you dread dogs, Miss Barbary. I will walk home with you," he said, as she at last came through, the gun having got to a safe distance.

"Oh, but ——" she was beginning, and then stopped in confusion, blushing hotly, and looking at both of us. "I should like it; but —— would it be proper?"

"Proper!" echoed Tod, staring, and then bursting into a fit of laughter long and loud. "Oh, dear! why, Miss Barbary, you must be French all over! Johnny, you can come, too. Lena, run back again; you have not any hat on."

Crossing the road to take the near field way, we went along the path that led beside the hedge, and soon came in view of Caramel Cottage; it was only a stone's throw, so to say, from our house. An uncommonly lonely look it had, buried there amid many trees, with the denser trees of the Grove close beyond it. We asked her whether she did not find it dull here.

"At first I did, very; I do still a little: it is so different from the lively town I have lived in, where we knew all the people, and they knew us. But we shall soon be more lively," she resumed, after a pause. "A cousin is coming to stay with us."

"Indeed," said Tod. "Is it a lady or a gentleman?"

"Oh, it is a gentleman—Edgar Reste. He is not my cousin by kin; not really related to me; but papa says he will be as my cousin, as my brother even, and that he is very nice. Papa's last wife was Miss Reste, and he is her nephew. He is a barrister in London, and he has been much overworked, and he is coming here to-morrow for rest and country air."

Within the low green gate of the little front garden of Caramel Cottage stood Mr. Barbary, in his brown velveteen shooting coat and breeches of the same, that became him and his straight lithe limbs so well. Every time I saw him the beauty of his face struck me afresh; but so did the shifty expression of his eyes.

"There's papa!" exclaimed the girl, her dimples lighting up. "And—why there's a gentleman with him—a stranger! I wonder who it is?"

I saw him as he came from the porch down the narrow garden-path. A slight, slender young man of middle height and distinguished air, with a pale, worn, nice-looking face, and laughing, luminous, dark brown eyes. Yes, I saw Edgar Reste for the first time at this his entrance at Caramel Cottage, and it was a thing to be thankful for that I could not then foresee the nameless horror his departure from it (I may as well say his disappearance) was to shadow forth.

"How do you do?" said Mr. Barbary to us, courteously civil. "Katrine, here's a surprise for you: your cousin is come. Edgar, this is my little girl.—Mr. Reste," he added, by way of introduction generally.

Mr. Reste lifted his hat, bowed slightly, and then turned to

Katrine with outstretched hand. She met it with a hot blush, as if strange young men did not shake hands with her every day.

"We did not expect you quite so soon," she gently said, to atone for her first surprise.

"True," he answered. "But I felt unusually out of sorts yesterday, and I thought it would make no difference to Mr. Barbary whether I came to-day or to-morrow."

His voice had a musical ring; his manner was open and honest. He might be Pointz Barbary's nephew by marriage, but I am sure he was not by nature.

"They'll fall in love with one another, those two; you'll see," said Tod to me as we went home. "Did you mark his pleased face when he spoke to her, Johnny—and how she blushed?"

"O, come now, Tod! they tell me I am fanciful. What are you?"

"Not fanciful with your fancies, lad. As to you, Mr. Don"—turning to the dog, which had done nothing but growl while we stood before Barbary's gate, "unless you mend your manners, you shall not come out again. What ails you, sir, to-day?"

II.

If love springs out of companionship, why then, little wonder that it found its way into Caramel Cottage. They were with each other pretty nearly all day and every day, that young man and that young woman; and so—what else was to be expected?

"We must try and get you strong again," said Mr. Barbary to his guest, who at first, amid other adverse symptoms, could eat nothing. No matter what dainty little dish old Joan prepared, Mr. Reste turned from it.

Mr. Barbary had taken to old Joan with the house. A little, dark, active woman, she, with bright eyes and a mob-cap of muslin. She was sixty years old; quick, capable, simple, and kindly. We don't get many such servants now-a-days. One defect Joan had—deafness. When a voice was close to her, it was all right; at a distance she could not hear it at all.

"How long is it that you have been ailing, cousin Edgar," asked Miss Barbary, one day when they were sitting together.

"O, some few weeks, cousin Katrine," he answered in a tone to imitate hers—and then laughed. "Look here, child, don't call me 'cousin Edgar!' For pity's sake, don't!"

"I know you are not my true cousin," she said, blushing furiously.

"It's not for that. If we were the nearest cousins that can be, it would still be silly." Objectionable, was the word he had all but used. "It is bad taste; has not a nice sound to cultivated ears. I am Edgar, if you please; and you are Katrine."

"In France we say 'mon cousin,' or 'ma cousine,' when speaking to one," returned Katrine.

"But we are not French; we are English."

"Well," she resumed, as her face cooled down—"why did you not take rest before? and what is it that has made you ill?"

He shook his head thoughtfully. The parlour window, looking to the front, was thrown up before them. A light breeze tempered the summer heat, wafting in sweetness from the homely flowers and scented shrubs. The little garden was crowded with them, as all homely gardens were then. Roses, lilies, columbines, stocks, gillyflowers, sweet peas, sweet Williams, pinks white and red, tulips, pansies (or as they were then very generally called, garden-gates), mignonette, bachelor's buttons, and lots of others, sweet or not sweet, that I can't stay to recall: and clusters of marjoram and lavender and "old-man" and sweet-briar, and jessamines white and yellow, and woodbine, and sweet syringa; and the tall hollyhock, and ever true but gaudy sunflower—each and all flourished there in their respective seasons. Amidst the grand "horticulture," as it is phrased, of these modern days, it is a pleasure to lose oneself in the memories of these dear old simple gardens. Sometimes I get wondering if we shall ever meet them again—say in Heaven.

They sat there at the open window enjoying the fragrance. Katrine had made a paper fan, and was gently fluttering it to and fro before her flushed young face.

"I have burnt the candle at both ends," continued Mr. Reste. "That is what's the matter with me."

"Y—es," hesitated she, not quite understanding.

"At my law business all day, and at my literary work the best part of the night, year in and year out—it has told upon me, Katrine."

"But why should you do both?" asked Katrine.

"Why? Oh, because—because my pocket is a shallow pocket, and has, moreover, a hole in it."

She laughed.

"Not getting briefs showered in upon me as one might hope my merits deserve—I know not any young barrister who does—I had to supplement my earnings in that line by something else, and I took to writing. *That* is up-hill work, too; but it brings in a few shillings now and again. One must pay one's way, you know, Katrine, if possible; and with some of us it is apt to be a rather extravagant way."

"Is it with you?" she asked, earnestly.

"It *was*. I squandered money too freely at first. My old uncle gave me a fair sum to set up with when my dinners were eaten and I was called; and I suppose I thought the sum would never come to an end. Ah, me! we buy our experience dearly."

"Will not the old uncle give you more?"

"Not a stiver—this long while past. He lives in India, and writing to ask him does no good. And he is the only relative left to me in the world."

"Except papa."

Edgar Reste lifted his eyebrows. "Your papa is not my relative, young lady. His late wife was my aunt; my father's sister."

"Did your father leave you no money, when he died?"

"Not any. He was a clergyman with a good benefice, but he lived up to his income and did not save. No, I have only myself to lean on. Don't know whether it will turn out to be a broken reed."

"If I could only help you!" breathed Katrine.

"You are helping me more than I can express," he answered, impulsively. "When with you I get a feeling of rest—of peace. And that's what I want."

Which avowal brought a hot blush again to Miss Katrine's cheek and a curious thrill somewhere round about her heart.

Time went on. Before much of it had elapsed, they were in love with one another for ever and for ever, with that first love that comes but once in a lifetime. That is, in secret; it was not betrayed or spoken of by either of them, or intended to be. Mr. Reste, Barrister-at-law (and briefless), could as soon have entertained thoughts of setting up a coach-and-four, as of setting up a wife. He had not a ghost of the means necessary at present, he saw not the smallest chance yet of attaining them. Years and years and years might go by before that desirable pinnacle in the social race was reached; and it might never be reached at all. It would be the height of dishonour, as he considered, to persuade Katrine Barbary into an engagement, which might never be fulfilled. How could he condemn her to wear out her heart and her life and her days in loneliness, sighing for him, never seeing him—he at one end of the world, she at the other? for that's how, lover-like, he estimated the distance between this and the metropolis. So he never let a word of his love escape him, and he guarded his looks, and treated Katrine as his little cousin.

And she? Be you sure, she was as reticent as he. An inexperienced young maiden, scrupulously and modestly brought up, she kept her secret zealously. It is true she could not help her blushes, or the tell-tale thrilling of her soft voice; but Edgar Reste was not obliged to read them correctly.

Likely enough he could penetrate, as the weeks wore on, some of the ins and outs in the private worth of Mr. Barbary. In fact, he *did* do so. He found that gentleman rather addicted to going abroad at night when reasonable people were in bed and asleep. Mr. Barbary gave him his views upon the subject. Poaching, he maintained, was a perfectly legitimate and laudable occupation. "It's one to be proud of, instead of the contrary," he asserted, one September day, when they were in the gun-room together. "*Proud of*, Edgar."

"For a gentleman?" laughed Mr. Reste, who invariably made light of the subject. And he glanced at his host curiously from between his long dark eyelashes and straight, fine eyebrows; at the dark,

passive, handsome face, at the long slender fingers, busy over the lock of his favourite gun.

"For a gentleman, certainly. Why should common men usurp all its benefit? The game laws are obnoxious laws, and it behoves us to set them at naught."

Another amused laugh from Mr. Reste.

"Who hesitates to do a bit of smuggling?" argued the speaker. "Answer me that, Reste. Nobody. Nobody, from a prince to a peasant, from poor Jack Tar to his superfine commander, but deems it meritorious to cheat the Customs. When a man lands here or yonder with a few contraband things about him, and gets them through safely, do his friends and acquaintances turn the cold shoulder upon him? Not a bit of it; they regard it as a fine feather in his cap."

"O, no doubt."

"Poaching is the same thing. It is also an amusement. O, it is grand fun, Edgar Reste, to be out on a fine night and dodge the keepers!" continued Mr. Barbary, with enthusiasm. "The spice of daring in it, of danger, if you choose to put it that way, stimulates the nerves like wine."

"Not quite orthodox, though, mon ami."

"Orthodox be hanged. Stolen pleasures are sweetest, as we all know. You shall go out with me some night, Edgar, and judge for yourself."

"Don't say but I will—just to look on—if you'll ensure my getting back in safety," said the barrister, in a tone that might be taken for jest or earnest, assent or refusal.

"Back in safety!" came the mocking echo, as if to get back in safety from midnight poaching were a thing as sure as the sun. "We'll let a week or two go on; when shooting first comes in, the keepers are safe to be on the alert; and then I'll choose a night for you."

"All right. I suppose Katrine knows nothing of this?"

Mr. Barbary lodged his gun in the corner against the wainscot, and turned to look at the barrister. "Katrine!" he repeated, in surprised reproach. "Why, *no*. And take care that you don't tell her."

Mr. Reste nodded.

"She is the most unsuspicious, innocent child in regard to the ways of the naughty world that I've ever met with," resumed Barbary. "I don't think she as much as knows what poaching means."

"I wonder you should have her here," remarked the younger man, reflectively.

"How can I help it? There's nowhere else for her to be. She is too old to be put to school; and if she were not, I have not the means to pay for her. It does not signify; she will never suspect anything," concluded Mr. Barbary.

Please do not think Caramel Cottage grand enough to possess a regular "gun-room." Mr. Barbary called it so, because he kept his two guns in it, also his fishing-tackle and things of that sort. Entering

at the outer porch and over the level door-sill, to the narrow house passage, the parlour lay on the left, and was of pretty good size. The gun-room lay on the right; a little square room with bare boards, unfurnished, save for a deal table, a chair or two, and a strong cupboard let into the wall, which the master of the house kept locked. Behind this room was the kitchen, which opened into the back yard. This yard, on the kitchen side, was bounded by dwarf wooden palings, having a low gate in their midst. Standing at the gate and looking sideways, you could see the chimnies of Dyke Manor. On the opposite side, the yard was enclosed by various small out-buildings and adjuncts belonging to a cottage homestead. A rain-water barrel stood in the corner by the house; an open shed next, in which knives were cleaned and garden tools kept; then came the pump; and lastly, a little room called the brewhouse, used for washing and brewing, and for cooking also during the worst heat of summer. A furnace was built beside the grate, and its floor was paved with square red bricks. Beyond this yard, quite open to it, lay a long garden, well filled with vegetables and fruit trees, and enclosed by a high hedge. Upstairs were three bed chambers. Mr. Barbary occupied the largest and best, which was over the parlour; the smaller one over the gun-room had been assigned to Edgar Reste, both of them looking front; while Katrine's room was above the kitchen, looking to the yard and the garden. Old Joan slept in a lean-to loft in the roof. There is a reason for explaining all this.

III.

He had looked like a ghost when we went to school after the races; he looked like a hale, hearty man when we got home from the holidays at Michaelmas and to eat the goose. Of course he had had pretty near eight weeks' spell of idleness and country air at Caramel Cottage. To say the truth, we felt surprised at his being there still.

"Well, it *is* longer than I meant to stay," Mr. Reste admitted, when Tod said something of this. "The air has done wonders for me."

"Why longer? The law courts do not open yet."

"I had thoughts of going abroad. However, that can stay for next year."

"Have you had any shooting?"

"No. I do not possess a licence."

It was on the tip of Tod's tongue, as I could well see, to ask why he did not take out a licence, but he checked it. This little colloquy was held at the Manor gate on Saturday, the day after our return. Miss Barbary was leaving Lena at the usual time, and he had come strolling across the field to meet her. They went away together.

"What did I tell you, Johnny?" said Tod, turning to me, as soon as they were out of hearing. "It is a regular case of over-head-and-ears: cut, and dried, and pickled."

"I don't see what you judge by, Tod."

"*Don't you!* You'll be a muff to the end, lad. Fancy a fine young fellow like Reste, a man of the world, staying on at that pokey little place of Barbary's unless he had some strong motive to keep him there! I dare say he pays Barbary well for the accommodation."

"I dare say Barbary could not afford to entertain him unless he did."

"He stops there to make love to her. It must be a poor look-out, though, for Katrine, pretty little dimpled girl! As much chance of a wedding, I should say, as of a blue moon."

"Why not?"

"Why not! Want of funds. I'd start for London, if I were you, Johnny, and set the Thames on fire. A man must be uncommonly hard up when he lets all the birds go beside him for want of taking out a licence."

They were walking onwards, slowly, Mr. Reste bending to talk to her. And of course it will be understood that a good deal of that which I have said, and am about to say, is only related from what came to my knowledge later on.

"Is it true that you had meant to go abroad this year?" Katrine was asking him.

"Yes, I once thought of it," he answered. "I have friends living at Dieppe, and they wanted me to go to them. But I have stayed on here instead. Another week of it, ten days perhaps, and then I must leave Worcestershire and you, Katrine."

"But why?"

"Why, to work, my dear little girl. That is getting in arrears shamefully. We are told that all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy; but all play and no work would have worse results for Jack than dullness. Ah, Katrine, what a world this might be if we could only do as we like in it!"

"When shall you come again?"

"Perhaps never," he answered, incautiously.

"Never!" she repeated, her face turning white before she could hide it from him. It was a great shock.

"Katrine, my dear," he said with some emotion, his tone low and earnest, "I could stay at Caramel Cottage for my whole life and never wish to quit it, unless I carried somebody else away from it with me. But there are things which a poor man, a man without money in the present or prospect of it in the future, may not as much as glance at: he must put the temptation from him and hold it at arm's length. I had a dream the other night," he added, after a pause: "I thought I was a Q.C. and stood in my silk, haranguing a full bench of judges at Westminster—who listened to me with attentive suavity. When I awoke I burst out laughing."

"At the contrast it presented to reality?" she breathed.

"Just at that. If I were but making enough to set up a snug

little nest of a home, though ever so small, it would be—something: but I am not. And so, Katrine, you see that many things I would do I cannot do; cannot even think of. And there it lies, and there it ends."

"Yes, I see, Edgar," she answered, softly sighing.

"Shall you miss me when I am gone?"

Some queer feeling took her throat; she could not speak. Mr. Reste stooped to pick a little pale blue-bell that grew under the hedge.

"I do not know how I shall bear with the loneliness then," she said in answer, seemingly more to herself than to him, or to the blue sky right before her, on which her eyes were fixed. "And I shall be more afraid when you are no longer in the house."

"Afraid!" he exclaimed, turning to her in blank surprise. "What are you afraid of, Katrine?"

"It—it is all so solitary for me. . . . Old Joan is too deaf to be talked to much; and papa is either at work in the garden or shut up in the gun-room, busy with his things. Please don't laugh at my childishness!"

She had made a pause, as put just to get over her embarrassment, the avowal having slipped from her unwittingly. The fact was, poor Katrine Barbary had been rudely awakened from her state of innocent security. Some days back, when in the cottage hut of Mary Standish, for Katrine liked to go about and make friends with the people, that ill-doing husband of Mary's, Jim, chanced to be at home. Jim had just been had up before the magistrates at Alcester on some suspicion connected with snares and gins, but there was no certain proof forthcoming, and he had to be discharged. Katrine remarked that if she were Jim she should leave off poaching, which must be a very dreadful thing, and frightfully hazardous. Mr. Jim replied that it was not a dreadful thing, nor hazardous either, for them that knew what they were about, and he referred her to her father for confirmation of this assertion. One word led to another. Jim Standish, his ideas loose and lawless, never thought to hurt the young lady by what he disclosed, for he was kind enough when he had no motive to be the contrary, but when Katrine left the hut, she carried with her the terrible knowledge that her father was as fond of poaching as the worst of them. Since then she had lived in a state of chronic terror.

"Yes, it must be very solitary for you," assented Mr. Reste in a grave tone, and he had no idea that her answer was an evasive one, or its lightness put on; "but I cannot help you, Katrine. Should you ever need counsel, or—or protection in any way, apply for it to your friends at Dyke Manor. They seem kind, good people, and would be strong to aid."

Turning in at the little side gate as he spoke, they saw Mr. Barbary at work in the garden. He was digging up a plot of ground some seven or eight feet square under the branches of the summer-apple

tree, which grew at this upper end of the garden, nearly close to the yard.

"What is he going to plant there, I wonder?" listlessly spoke Mr. Reste, glancing at the freshness of the turned-up mould.

"Winter cabbages, perhaps; but I am sure I don't know," returned Katrine. "I do not understand the seasons for planting vegetables as papa does."

This, as I have just said, was on Saturday. We saw Mr. Reste and Katrine at church the next day: a place Barbary did not often trouble with his presence; and walked with them, on coming out, as far as the two ways lay. Our people liked the look of Edgar Reste, but had not put themselves forward to make much acquaintance with him, on account of Barbary. One Tuesday, when the squire was driving to Alcester, he had overtaken Mr. Reste walking thither to have a look at the market, and he invited him to a seat in the carriage. They drove in and drove back together, and had between the times a snack of bread-and-cheese at the Angel. The Squire took quite a fancy to the young barrister, and openly said to him he wished he was staying anywhere but at Caramel Cottage.

"You are thinking of leaving soon, I hear," said the Squire to him, as we halted in a group when parting, on this same walk from church.

"In about a week," replied Mr. Reste. "I may go on Saturday next; certainly not later than the following Monday."

"Shall you like a drive to Evesham between this and then?" went on the Squire. "I am going over there one of these days."

"I shall like it very much indeed."

"Then I will let you know which day I go. Good bye."

"Good bye," answered Mr. Reste, lifting his hat in salute to us all, as he walked on with Katrine.

Am I lingering over these various trifling details? I suppose it will seem so. But the truth is, a dreadful part of the story is coming on (as poor Katrine said of the poaching) and my pen holds back from approaching it.

A day or two had gone on. It was Tuesday morning, warm and bright with sunshine. Katrine sat in the parlour at Caramel Cottage, pouring out the coffee at the breakfast table.

"Will you take some ham, Katrine?"

"No thank you, papa; I am not hungry."

"Not hungry! nonsense!" and Mr. Barbary put a slice of ham on her plate. "Do you feel inclined for a walk as far as Church Leet this morning, Edgar?"

"I don't mind," said Mr. Reste. "About three miles, is it not?"

"Three miles across the fields as straight as the crow flies. I want to see a man who lives there. He—why that's Pettipher coming here!—the letter-man," broke off Mr. Barbary. Letters were not written every day then, and very few found their way to Caramel Cottage.

Old Joan went to the door, and then came in. She was like a picture. A dark-blue linsey gown down to her ancles, neat black stockings and low, tied shoes, a check apron, and a bow of black ribbon perched in front behind the flapping border of her white muslin mob cap.

"Pettipher says 'tis for the gentleman," said Joan, putting the letter, a thick one, on the table by Mr. Reste.

"Why, it is from Amphlett!" he exclaimed, as he took it up, looking at the great sprawling writing. "What on earth has he got to say?"

Opening the letter, a roll of bank notes fell out. Mr. Reste stared at them with intense curiosity.

"Is it your ship come in?" asked Katrine gaily: for he was wont to say he would do this or that when "his ship came home."

"No, Katrine; not much chance of that. Let me see what he says."

"Dear Reste,—I enclose you my debt at last. The other side have come to their senses, and given in, and paid over to me instalment the first. Thank you, old friend; you are a good fellow never to have bothered me. Let me know your movements when you write back; I ask it particularly. Ever yours, W. A."

"Well, I never expected that," cried Mr. Reste, as he read the words aloud.

"Money lent by you, Edgar?" asked Mr. Barbary.

"Yes; three or four years ago. I had given it up as a bad job. Never thought he would gain his cause."

"What cause? Who is he?"

"Captain Amphlett, of the Artillery, and an old friend of mine. As to the cause, it was some injustice that his avaricious relatives involved him in, and he had no resource but to bring an action. I am glad he has gained it; he is an honest fellow, no match for them in cunning."

Mr. Reste was counting the notes while he spoke; six of them for ten pounds each. Katrine happened to look at her father, and was startled at the expression of his face—at the grasping, covetous, *evil* regard he had fixed upon the notes. She felt frightened, half sick, with some vague apprehension. Mr. Reste smoothed the notes out one by one, and laid them open on the breakfast cloth in a little stack. While doing this, he caught Mr. Barbary's covetous look.

"You'd like such a windfall yourself," he said laughingly to his host.

"I should. For *that* a man might be tempted to smother his grandmother."

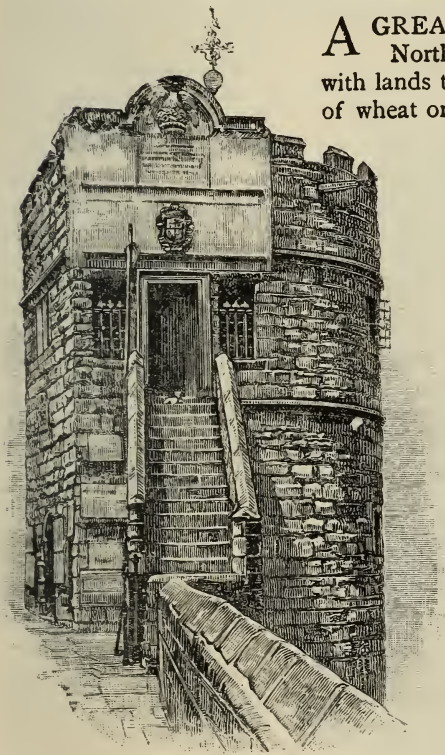
Katrine instinctively shuddered, though the avowal was given in a half jesting tone. A prevision of evil seized upon her.

But there is no room for more this month.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

AMONG THE WELSH.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "Cruise of the Reserve Squadron," &c.



Phœnix Tower.

A GREAT gulf divides Norway from North Wales. A chasm filled up with lands that bear grain, it may chance of wheat or some other grain; and trees whose leaves have their time to fall—but, as a little Scotch girl once beautifully said, their time to come again. A chasm in which seas ebb and flow and rivers have their tides, and people wax great, and run to and fro upon the earth. There is a mighty sound as of rushing waters, but it is only the murmur of many voices. There is no rest in the length and breadth of the land, but all is excitement, and every one must be in action. Small leagues have brazen trumpets to go before them, and larger ones band themselves into "armies"—with more than trumpets in advance. But over all this hubble bubble is the calm blue sky, now even as it was in the beginning, as it will be to the end. And those who are faint and weary for want of repose, and sick with watching for signs and tokens, and longing for less of the sounding brass and more of the spirit of old, may look upwards and gaze for ever at that blue sky whose serenity no man can ruffle, and speak this comfort unto their souls: "In quietness and confidence shall be their strength."

But having brought Norway and North Wales into comparison, I must give a reason for doing so; and I have no better reason than that it has recently fallen to my lot to pass from the one country to the other. Yet, in some ways, perhaps it is hardly wise to enter upon the beauties of Wales whilst the attractions of Norway still linger

vividly in the memory. Whether we will or not, comparisons suggest themselves. The one is a land of mountains, the other of hills: the one has gigantic waterfalls, swift rivers, roaring torrents, immense valleys and endless forests; the other possesses these attractions, but only in miniature. Once or twice, after having taken some trouble and gone some distance to see a Welsh waterfall, I almost felt—by the mere act of involuntary comparison—that it was all a deception. Le jeu ne valait pas la chandelle.

On the other hand, last summer, in Norway, I made a pilgrimage of nearly fourteen hours to a waterfall—walking most of the time—and surely neither saint nor sinner ever reached a more perfect, holier shrine. An immense mass of water came tumbling down from a gigantic height in endless volumes of white foam. The rocks formed a cul-de-sac in a semicircle, towering and broken, and the water rushed and roared and echoed mightily in this natural basin; drenching spray flew upwards and around in such showers that only those supplied with waterproofs could venture within the sacred precincts of the basin itself. Here was neither disappointment nor disillusion, and twice twelve hours' labour might have been worthily spent in such a cause. A great waterfall is one of the grandest sights of the world, and the Skæggedalsfoss is considered by many the finest waterfall in Norway—that land, par excellence, of roaring cataracts and rushing torrents.

STANLEY HOUSE.

North Wales can show us nothing of this kind. Nevertheless, its attractions are not to be disputed. If they do not take the affections by storm, but more quietly win their way, the result is none the less certain. Many parts you feel that you would like to see over and over again; some must be seen at least once more.

Our rapid manner of going about a country in these days is one of

the great drawbacks to travelling. It is the worm in the bud, the thorn in the rose. Not to become intimate and familiar with all the beauties of nature through which we pass is a positive pain. And yet it is impossible to do so. Long and oft-repeated sojourns would be necessary, and life would be as much too short for the task as it is too brief to read, mark, and digest the works of all the great writers that have lived. In the one case we must be content with seeing and remembering; an acquaintance not a friendship with the beauties of Earth: the other becomes a matter of selection.

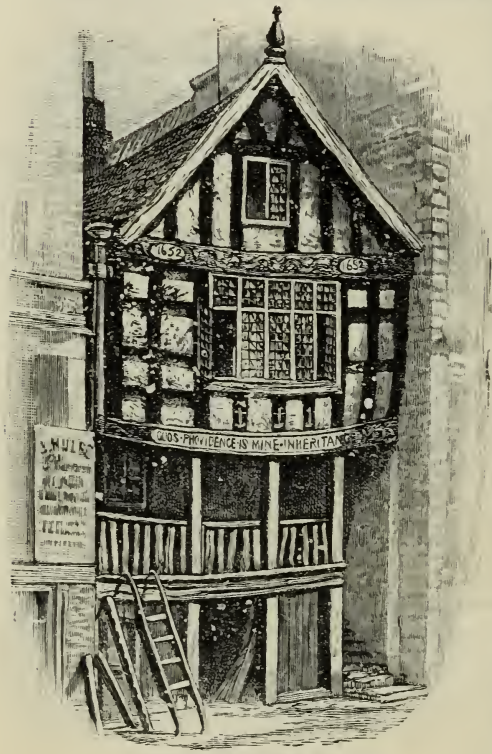
And so, reader, to enter at once upon our theme; to abandon comparisons, which at any rate here need find no place; we will suppose ourselves possessed of the magic carpet, or a couple of witches' broomsticks, and, flying through the air over lands and seas, through clouds and amongst the stars, finally alight together in the fair city of Chester. This is a very good starting point for North Wales.

An Old Inn.

But I am not certain that Chester should be called fair, if the adjective implies youth as well as beauty. A great deal in Chester is undoubtedly modern, but this is exactly what spoils the town. One has heard so much about its antiquity that one expects more than is to be found. All the wonderful drawings and paintings I had seen of the place idealized it beyond conception. They had given me the notion of a species of Nuremberg. In that wonderful old town no modern houses break the spell and silence of the past. The centuries though dead still seem to speak. You walk the streets and everything that greets the eye carries you back to the middle ages. The men and women you meet seem a discord in their nineteenth-century costumes. Surely, too, their faces and forms ought to be old and wrinkled and bowed, not young and laughing and upright: not those bright eyes and earnest hopes and passionate loves. The very nightingales in their

cages as they pour forth a flood of melody by day and night seem out of place: certainly in the night hours we think them so, and wish they had lived and flourished and departed with the bygone days. The very blueness and brightness of the sky seem too new and young and fresh to canopy this ghostly city of a departed world. But the impression is altogether delightful as it is rare, and Nuremberg takes its place for ever in the heart and memory.

Something of this sort, if in a modified form, I expected to find in Chester, and was disappointed. Your entrance to the town is unfortunate, for the railway lands you without the walls, and the streets are new, and the red brick houses seem to blush for their very youth.



GOD'S PROVIDENCE HOUSE.

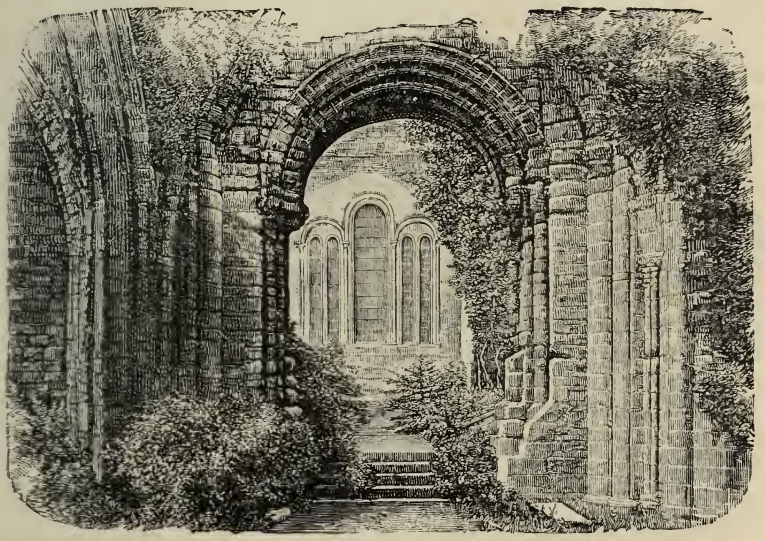
But presently you pass under an old gateway, reach the comfortable Grosvenor Hotel, and to a certain extent enter a new world. For round about here in a small space, though not exactly a nutshell, lies all that remains of Old Chester. You are now within the City walls.

No doubt Chester, even in its present state, is unique in England; but it is impossible to help seeing that with the exercise of a little judgment it might have been very much more picturesque, because more uniform than it is. Had all new houses been built after the one old type, the eye need not have been offended by a modern tenement of straight lines and square windows placed side by side with a fine old building of the sixteenth century with carved woodwork and gabled roofs and latticed panes.

But even many of the ancient houses are not as they were. Time beautifies by destroying, and if buildings are not to go altogether to ruin, they must be restored. For this reason many of the old Chester houses are old only in form and outline. But there are a few exceptions; such, for instance, as Stanley House, which stands back in a

court so small that the house itself seems to have outgrown its site. It is now given over to be the habitation of the humble, or at least the lowly; for humility, unlike the violet, sometimes gives itself airs; and oaken doors admit you into lumber rooms scantily lighted by windows that seem almost in their original condition.

Whilst you are standing as far from the house as possible, against the dead wall—it is only about a yard or two in depth—admiring the pointed gables—three, not seven in number—ancient windows, and carved woodwork with its little Norman arches, out comes the inevitable young man who politely offers to show you everything that you can see for yourself; an offer you as inevitably and politely accept. To-day he is in his Sunday's best—for it is the seventh day—and he



RUINED CHANCEL, ST. JOHN'S CHURCH.

takes you round to the back premises, and points out little bits that perhaps might have escaped notice, and pilots you through the above-mentioned lumber room, where certainly you might have come to grief in a solitary inspection. But he does not go through his lesson with the fluency of frequent repetition. The youth is modest in look and tone, slow of utterance, bears himself with a sort of silent apology for offering to do what is almost unnecessary, because the chance of a quid-pro-quo, however small, was not to be resisted. And so one feels sure that he is there only because it happens to be Sunday and tea-time—we can see the festive board through the window and the family party surrounding it—and that to-morrow morning will find him at a more independent, more manly way of earning his living than idling about on the chance of piloting through the old premises anyone whom fate or fortune may throw in his way.

We should very much like to go upstairs and explore the rooms lighted by those fine old windows, and see what other traces of antiquity they contain, but he does not respond to a hint delicately thrown out—perhaps too much so for his penetration. So, fearing to intrude, we dismiss the idea. He gives the correct salute as he disappears through a door which is certainly not ancient into his living-room, and we pass out into the open street and—just about here—a very different world: modern houses, and high walls, and nothing at all out of the common.

But higher up you come to one of the oldest and most dilapidated-looking streets, and some of the rarest houses. There is the famous God's Providence House, with its prominent motto "God's Providence is mine inheritance;" because, at the time of the plague, it was almost the only house in Chester that escaped infection. There is also the date, 1652. But very little remains of the old house except this date and motto. It has been restored, and has lost much of its old character. Just beyond it is Bishop Lloyd's house, of still older date, with quaint carvings. The street itself is narrow and somewhat shabby, and certainly to stand on the opposite side and look down upon the outer surface of the "Row," is to gaze upon a scene and a picture not to be found in any other town in England. They have crypts, too, some of these houses—strange, singular constructions, with fine arches supported by pillars. Here secret services might have been held, in the days when people were not free to choose their own mode of worship, and some, for conscience sake, went bravely to the stake.

Thus it seems that, after all, it is a first impression of Chester that is chiefly disappointing. Day by day the town grows upon you, and becoming more familiar with it, you like it more. You do your best to overlook the modern element, and what does exist of the ancient gradually asserts its influence.

The "Rows," curious in one sense, are not to be imitated. It is as if the ground floor of each house had been removed, or the first floor built out, so that you walk under a long covered passage or arcade, containing the best shops in Chester; an excellent arrangement for rainy weather. But the shops are somewhat dark in consequence. These "Rows" have altogether a very different effect from those "arcades" that you meet with in some of the old towns abroad. Take, for instance, those of Annecy: a long series of massive stone arches, solemn, gloomy, and depressing; suggestive of a bygone age almost of barbarism; an age of darkness, for very little light penetrates to the small shops in the recesses. Nevertheless, by their very grimness, a gloom which seems portentous, and by their regularity, suggestive of a fixed purpose carried out, they become distinctly characteristic, and make a lasting impression upon the mind.

The "Rows" of Chester, on the contrary, are irregular, and are not

carried out in a straight line. There are four streets of "Rows," and they meet at a point called the High Cross, one of the most interesting spots in the town. Turn which way you will from the centre of the road, Chester looks its oldest and best. Bridge Street is a little too open, shows too many modern houses; but in no other town in England is there to be found such a view of antiquity—such interesting and perfect remains of an age whose customs are as extinct as if they had never existed.

Behind us, too, facing Bridge Street, is the fine old church of St. Peter, looking like a small portion detached from some ancient cathedral, adding a grave ecclesiastical dignity to the High Cross, an odour of sanctity, which adds very much to the interest of the scene.

Straight down Bridge Street, with rows on either side, you come to what is said to be the oldest house in Chester. It certainly looks it, and seems ready to crumble into the dust of ages. Nevertheless, its date, taking you back some eight hundred years in the world's history, may possibly be fictitious. The lower part is partitioned off into two small shops; the upper portion apparently is still undivided. It has a gabled roof, and large latticed windows that look as if they *might* have seen the sun rise and set for eight centuries; and the woodwork, to all appearance, might have come out of Noah's ark. The house leans very much to the right, and seems to depend entirely upon its left-hand neighbour for support. On the right-hand it is unsupported. A narrow alley conducts to a door, where a notice informs you that "gentlemen" may obtain lodgings here. It does not add that they must not be too exacting in the matters of light and cleanliness, but as the entrance plainly says that for itself the caution would be superfluous.

Whilst looking at this interesting old relic of the past, a little woman came out of a small shop of "general necessities," and hospitably invited me in to inspect her part of the premises. No thought of a quid-pro-quo was here. She was a genuine lover of the ancient, and ought to have been a member of the Antiquarian Society. With pride and an amount of relish and animation truly refreshing, she pointed out the immense thickness of the walls, the beauty of the windows, the old staircase, the places where windows had been and were no longer, inequalities which were the result of ages, and blackness of carved wood which was not, in her case, the result of neglect. She discoursed eloquently upon antiquities, and when I ventured a half doubt about the age recorded upon the house—I think it was 1065—I found that I had disturbed a slumbering volcano. It was evidently a tender point with her, and I had not been the first to put forth in her hearing so barbarous a suggestion.

There are many other curious houses in Bridge street, though none so old looking as the one just referred to. At the bottom of the street you come to Bridge gate: one of the old gates of the City walls, that at one time used to be closed against all outsiders when the

curfew "toll'd the knell of parting day." This curfew still tolls from the tower of the venerable Cathedral, but there are no gates to respond; no sentinels to keep guard and patrol with a clash of armour; no watchword to be given before gaining admittance. All these things have passed away with a former age; our present troubles and disturbances are of a different kind, but perhaps they come only the more home to us.

Beyond the gate flows the river Dee under a single arch, and just above it a little to the left a small steamer is waiting to take you up the stream as far as Holt and Farndon. She certainly was not built for an excursion boat, and even a small crowd would be

WATER TOWER AND ROMAN REMAINS.

unpleasant on board. But to-day, though market day (it is Saturday, and the day before our visit to Stanley House as recorded above), there are not twenty passengers, and at our end only a woman and her daughter in flounces and feathers and all the colours of the rainbow, who loudly and persistently devour sweetmeats from an unlimited supply, thereby raising within one all sorts of revengeful emotions; and a sister and two brothers who are going up merely because it happens to be a lovely day, and this is the pleasantest way of spending such a morning. These only add to the pleasure of the trip; they neither devour lozenges nor indulge in any other irritating habit.

We pass up the stream. Houses line the banks, weeping trees see their own reflections in the water, the grand old Church of St. John, a ruin at each end, stands out boldly. But all this is soon left behind,

and we pass into a river pure and simple, with sweeps and curves, and long stretches of fields, and banks and hedges laden with blackberries. In parts the country is finely wooded and there is much lawn-like land on the right.

Beyond Eaton Hall the river is less interesting, until you come in sight of the fine old Bridge of Holt, which dates back to the fourteenth century, and spans the river with eight arches. Before reaching it the boat draws up alongside the bank and a loose board is thrown from the steamer to the road, and everyone is requested with much boldness to take his life in his hands and make for the shore.

Half way up the hill, when all other passengers have hurried out of sight, I meet an old woman—she might have been ninety—

OLD HOUSE IN BRIDGE STREET.

staggering under the weight of two pails of fresh water which she has been to fetch from a well ever so far off. She struggles over the stile with them, continues her up-hill pilgrimage, and informs me that it is the best water in Cheshire. Perhaps it is; perhaps she only thinks so; any way, I sympathise with her and her heavy burden, but she only replies cheerfully that it is worth the fetching, and goes her way.

Farndon seemed a quiet, clean village, consisting apparently of one up-hill street, slightly curved, and at this moment destitute of a single inhabitant. There was a capital little inn in the place, the Nag's Head, and Mrs. Jones, the excellent and obliging landlady, did all she could at a moment's notice. She brought in four times the supply demanded, and when presently I remonstrated at the smallness of her reckoning and pointed to the ruins upon the table, she replied with genuine hospitality: "I only wish, sir, you had taken twice as much."

These types and incidents are rare, and brace up one's faith in human nature, which, with much opposite experience, is wont to get unstrung and out of order.

Whilst bustling about, Mrs. Jones informed me that, though empty now, she was full nearly all the summer, and every summer, and I could well believe it. There was something fresh and bracing in the air of Farndon, which would make it worth while to sojourn there for change and relaxation and rural walks. Farndon was flourishing, but Holt was a poor village—and I thought it looked so, as I strolled through it later on. Many of the people, said mine hostess, were dependent upon their strawberry gardens: gardens where you might day after day enjoy any quantity of strawberries-and-cream for a mere trifle—a luxury in itself sufficient to tempt any one to take up his "country quarters" at the Nag's Head in the strawberry season. When that season is a good one the inhabitants of Holt manage very well to keep body and soul together, but when the strawberries fail it goes hard with them.

Holt and Farndon are divided merely by the river and the old bridge. Farndon is in Cheshire, Holt in Denbighshire, and, slight though the line is, one can almost tell that in crossing the bridge you have passed out of England into Wales. It is less clean and prosperous, some of the small cottages are not inviting, and the people who inhabit them look rather rough and uncivilised. But it has a fine church, "almost as large as a small cathedral," said Mrs. Jones, of the Nag's Head, "and it would be a pity not to see it." I thought so too, but I had to make the most of the outside. It was locked up, and the sexton was not at hand. I turned into a small beershop to enquire for him, and found there would not be time to hunt him out. The landlady was drawing beer for a group of men, who were lounging on benches; three or four dirty children were howling lustily, and the woman, a poke bonnet tilted on her head, answered with the shortness and independence and scant civility so frequently met with in Wales.

So the only thing to be done was to walk quietly back to the little steamer, which was already making preparations and signals for returning to Chester.

And once again there, I think one appreciated the old town more, even after so short an absence. I turned to St. John's Church, which is still a grand building, and must once have been very splendid. It is said to date back to the seventh century and the days of Ethelred; has grand Norman arches and pillars, which I have only seen equalled (on British ground) in the cathedral of St. Magnus, in Orkney. St. John's was formerly the cathedral of Chester. Lately, the belfry fell with a great crash, carrying away the north doorway, which, though well restored, has now lost the beauty of antiquity. The belfry remains a ruin, and a solitary bell, on the south side of the church, rings people to service with a sound not musical though melancholy. At

the east end are the ruins of the original chancel, with broken Norman arches, lichen-covered in parts, and melancholy ivy here and there clings to crumbling and decaying stone. It is a small but very picturesque ruin, which has stood the test of ages; has seen its own glory and decadence, the rise and fall of nations and dynasties, whilst at its feet the quiet river has flowed and flows on for ever.

The city walls are, of course, one of the great features of Chester. They are about two miles in circumference, and were rebuilt by Ethelfrida in the tenth century. They have four gates, of which the custody was given, in the old days, to noblemen. At one part of the walls you come to the Phœnix Tower, where Charles I. of unhappy memory watched the defeat of his army at Rowton Moor, in 1645. Yet further, you reach the Water Tower and some interesting Roman remains.

A capital spot this from which to view the eclipse that was to take place to-night. And in due course the "full-orbed" moon rose, round as any shield that had helped to win or lose the battle on Rowton Moor on that unhappy day when Charles watched the ebbing of his fortunes. There was not a cloud in any part of the sky, and as the moon rose high and higher, she flooded the whole country with her pure light, and cast a trail of jewels over the river running its course beneath the walls. Then, in the fulness of time, the shadow crept over her surface, and it almost seemed as if the veil separating the seen from the unseen were about to be withdrawn, and ourselves admitted to celestial mysteries.

Slowly but surely the shadow crept on, until the whole country lay shrouded in blackness. There seemed a death in nature somewhere. The period of total obscurity appeared endless, but at last the moon began to emerge from that terrible black veil, that awful shadow, and one drew a breath of relief at the first faint silvery bow of reappearance. During the whole time the walls had been comparatively deserted.

But the glory of Chester is her cathedral. Though small in comparison with many, it is very interesting and full of beauty. The present diocese was founded by Henry VIII., and the Benedictine Abbey of St. Werburgh was chosen as a successor to that of St. John's. Since then, it has undergone many changes, and now shows a mixed style of architecture: the Norman, Early English, Decorated, and Perpendicular. Its least pleasing feature is the difference in size between the north and south transepts. The latter, until recently, was partitioned off from the rest of the building as a parish church to St. Oswald's, and here a separate service was held. The partition has been removed, and the transept has been thrown into the cathedral, but it has still to be restored. In size it is out of all proportion with the rest of the building, and is as large as the north transept is small. They differ widely in architecture, the north transept being partly Norman, partly Early English, the south Late Decorated.

But the cathedral has been wonderfully well restored by the late Sir Gilbert Scott. The choir is beautiful, the carved woodwork of the stalls and the screen almost matchless. The light tracery in no way conceals or obscures the outer nave and aisles. The organ is placed outside the choir in the north transept, but the small organ is above the choir screen. It is one of the largest cathedral organs in the kingdom, one of the handsomest, and certainly one of the most beautiful in tone. It is supported by sixteen columns of Italian marble, pillars worthy of their destination.

Through a door in the north transept you pass to the Chapter House and Library on the right, the Cloisters on the left. The greater portion of the cloisters has not been restored, and they are in that state of picturesque decay which the hand of time lays upon all

CRYPT UNDER ONE OF THE OLD HOUSES.

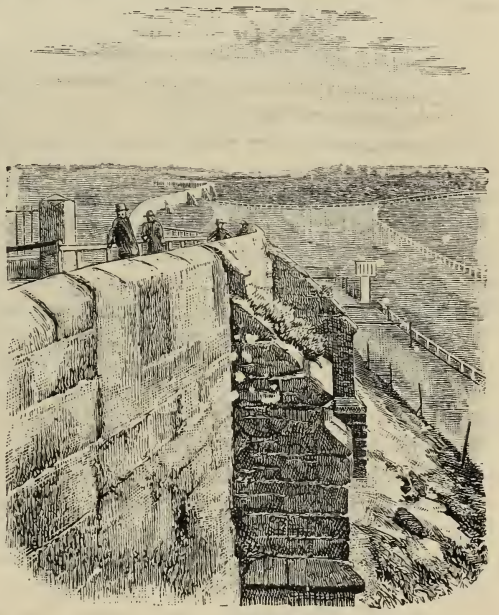
ancient buildings. They are almost black, crumbling in parts well nigh to ruin, peopled with the ghosts of dead and gone Benedictines. These cloisters carry you back in spirit and imagination to the days of the Roman Catholics and St. Werburgh more than any other part of the cathedral. It is delightful to wander about them, and pass into the old refectory on the one side, now used as a practising room for the choristers, or enter the dark and gloomy but interesting crypt on the other. There is nothing more picturesque about the cathedral than these decaying cloisters—which yet probably will not be allowed to crumble away to destruction. But once restored they will lose, of necessity, their greatest charm.

The central—and only—tower of the cathedral, contains a peal of eight bells, one of which rings the Curfew every night at a quarter to nine. Not that the inhabitants then retire to rest, for the streets at

night are filled with loiterers and idlers; young men and boys lounging about the rows and corners, and looking as if they were possessed by the very spirit of mischief. The oldest bell bears the date 1604, and the inscription:

I, sweetly tolling, men do call,
To taste the meat that feeds the soul.

On Sunday morning there was service in the choir, and at night in the nave. Our beautiful English service is doubly impressive when conducted in such a building, where one seems, indeed, surrounded by the "beauty of holiness." The grand organ pealed out and rolled and swelled through the arches, and the choir took up the strain in voices perfectly trained and attuned. There are few better church choirs than that of Chester, and one chorister especially, in a solo, sent his pure, high voice ringing through the aisles with all the beauty of a magic flute. The accompanying organ fell to the softest strains until its pulsations beat in unison with the waves of the boy's voice. Wave on wave went echoing down the long nave, and throughout all the congregation no hand stirred, no eye wandered; a "solemn silence" was over all.



CITY WALLS.

Then, the prayers over, the Bishop left his throne and mounted the pulpit stairs, and in an earnest sermon spoke to his hearers of some of the mysteries of the unseen world.

At night, too, the service was equally impressive, and the nave was filled with a large congregation. Above the pillars a long row of gas lights gave effect to the middle aisle, only increased by the shadow of the side aisles and the gloom of the choir beyond the closed gates and the fretted screen. It was a service for the people, and was heartily joined in. Voices rose with one accord in chants and hymns, led by the white-robed choir, whilst the organ put forth its powers, and the very edifice vibrated as if with emotion. The Dean preached: a simple, earnest sermon, most of which he said had been composed forty years ago. It would be unbecoming here

to launch out into praise, but it may be recorded that the preacher carried his hearers with him, for he seemed to possess the gift of sympathy, an earnest simplicity, a forgetfulness of self, and a sincerity in voice and expression which must have gone home to all hearts present.

When the service was over the organist continued for more than half-an-hour to play one thing after another, whilst many kept their seats and listened enchanted. The playing, perfect as it was, showed forth all the capabilities of the instrument. Now the full organ in mighty sounds would swell and crash and vibrate from end to end of the cathedral; and now in softest and gentlest, yet perfectly distinct strains, the plaintive and pathetic vox humana, in sweetest sounds would wane and pulsate about the pillars and arches and die away in silent whispers in the far off, darkened aisles.

One could have listened for hours, but there came the end, and the vergers began to put out the lights. For a moment I went through the north doorway into the cloisters. They were silent and deserted, and, partially lighted by the moon, were haunted by a sense of mystery—the mystery of the dead past. The shadow of death seemed to enshroud them like a visible atmosphere. Here the old Abbots in days gone by had been buried, and who could say that their spirits even now were not haunting these ghostly, decaying precincts? No spot more fitting in all Chester, scarcely in all England. Where the moon threw no light the cloisters were shadowed in a double blackness: the blackness of darkness and the blackness of age. Across there on the north side was the old refectory, with clinging ivy about the crumbling pillars. On the east was the crypt, shut in and locked up to-night, cold, gloomy, earthy, haunted with the memory of ages and ages. One shuddered in passing the very doorway, and involuntarily turned to see whether ghostly hands were opening and silently beckoning to us. Whether by day or night, the cloisters, though small, are wonderfully picturesque; they have a melancholy but an abiding charm.

Then back into the cathedral. Though now nearly in darkness, it was like coming from death into life. The last lights were being extinguished; the last footsteps were dying away towards the south door. The choir looked far off, the aisles were dark and silent. Those deep diapasons and silvery reeds that lately had swelled and crashed and floated and sighed throughout the space, were mute. This, too, seemed a sort of death in life. It was night within and without. As the last lights expired I reached the steps of the south doorway, and heard the last verger with echoing footsteps march down the silent nave.

It was my last vivid impression of Chester, and perhaps the best. Early the next morning I left the old city, and very soon the railway had carried me over the line which separates England from Wales. But the Celtic blood would bubble up and boil over if such a theme were more than touched upon at the end of a paper and we must wait until next month for its further development.

THE CONVERSION OF PROFESSOR NABS.

By the Author of "Adonais, Q.C."

JUST so far as the civilised world extended, just exactly so far extended the celebrity of Professor Nabs. He was one of England's prides, holding, as he did, a professorship in an English University; and one of Scotland's prides, too—for, of course, he was Scotch. Two-thirds of the half-daft geniuses upon the face of this earth are Scotch.

His scientific works had begun by setting all the learned scientific people, and all the learned *un*scientific people of the British Isles thrilling with excitement. Then fierce quarrels raged up and down the country, during which "Professor Nabs" in extra-sized types figured upon the bills of all the newspapers, until, at last, nearly all the world had got hold of this somehow:—Professor Nabs is a great and a wicked man.

Of course, that he was wicked very few indeed would have cared to deny. For, in the first place, his works were the very essence of wickedness—or so it was said; secondly, was he not the bosom crony of such sinners as Marlow, the philosopher, Spence, the geologist, Kingston, the astronomer; thirdly he never went to church; and fourthly, it was well known that he did such things upon a Sunday as no man who was not a sinner would ever dare to do.

As to his appearance, the reputation of it was almost as wide as the reputation of his learning. He was a very ugly as well as a very wicked man. He was excessively small and excessively thin, and he had a little round, fat face, with a monstrous mouth, the false teeth of which were perpetually tumbling together with a gurgle and a click; and he had a way of pressing up his lips so that they reminded one of the shape of a new moon. Two deep, wavering furrows, like black clouds, guarded each side of his little impertinent chin. His eyes were impertinent too, very black and ridiculously large, and crowned by a massive brow as white as snow, which was, of course, the strong point of his face. He walked with a little mincing step, like a dancing-master's, and, summer and winter, his small form was shrouded down to the knees by a faded brown overcoat.

Chumbleton proper lay in a valley. At the outskirts of the town stood St. Peter's, the fashionable church of the place, and from the door of St. Peter's a straight country road, called Cliff Road, bordered by two green banks, led up a hill to where a colony of villas and semi-detached houses had sprung up of late years. Professor Nabs' house, a fine rambling old place, overlooked one of these green banks, midway betwixt St. Peter's and the villas, a beautiful old-fashioned garden stretched away for several acres to the right of it.

Now it so happened that Professor Nabs had a mania for architecture; and as his three learned friends, like the sinners they were, generally chose Sunday for running down to see him, it was not an uncommon thing for the righteous worshippers of St. Peter's to be disturbed by an atrocious Scotch accent bursting in through the half-open windows with such profane snatches as "heedjous galleries," "meeserable buttresses," which were surely enough to put even saints beside themselves.

In addition to his mania for architecture, he had a mania for the pianoforte, which was still more frightful; for he was exceedingly fond of noise, and had a voice which was nothing if it was not loud. Thus it was a yet less uncommon thing for the same worshippers, on their way home to the colony of villas from the "heedjous galleries" of St. Peter's, to be made to turn red or blue, according to their complexions, and angry or amused, according to their dispositions, as they passed the open windows of Professor Nabs, by the sound of a pair of arms going like sledge-hammers, and a pair of pedals creaked up and down, and occasionally let fly with a bang, and a voice like a fog-horn, all hard at work upon some secular song which happened to be popular at the moment.

And yet so great was Professor Nabs, and so overwhelming is the power of greatness, that the élite of Chumbleton walking arm-and-arm along High Street with the élite of somewhere else, did not, on discerning a strange object on the horizon, see something to interest them on the other side of the street, but on the contrary bowed respectfully to the object, and remarked, with a certain amount of awe and pride: "Did you notice that person who lifted his hat to me just now?—that's Professor Nabs."

The Hospital for Incurables of Chumbleton stood in one of the dullest outskirts of the town; a low, rather damp house, with a tannery on one side, and a Salvation Army Hall on the other. It was not an agreeable place of residence for incurables or anyone else.

Upon the afternoon of the 25th April, 18—, six females, all more or less young, were sitting around a table in one of the dingiest rooms of this dingy house. It was the meeting of the Flower-Mission.

The first thing that struck one upon a cursory glance at this meeting was the extreme earnestness of its members. At the present moment a great hush of more than usually intense seriousness had fallen over them. Suddenly a small woman at one end of the table rose and spoke.

"Ladies," she said, "we now proceed to something which is even more important to each and all of us than the beloved work of distributing sweet-smelling blossoms to our beloved incurables. I mean what is commonly known amongst us as *Our Secret Mission.* I need not say that I am sure you all know to what I allude."

A murmur ran swiftly round amongst the other five. "The conversion of Professor Nabs."

"Just so," said the little lady, shaking her head and sighing. "Miss Smith, would you be so kind as to read the reports of the Society upon this subject."

A tall, pale young person, with elevated eye-brows, and a pince-nez settled a little awry upon an aquiline nose, opened a note-book slowly. The little lady sat down, and Miss Smith, in a quavering voice, began :—

"The conversion of Professor Nabs was first undertaken by this Society upon the 29th of March last. Upon the evening of that day an anonymous letter was posted, addressed to the Professor, and signed—'A Sincere Friend'—couched in the following terms :—'Professor Nabs,—You are working the ruin not only of yourself, but of thousands of innocent souls. Pause, turn, retrieve the past, before it is too late!' The Sunday after the despatch of this letter, a tract was slipped under the door by me. It was a very impressive one: 'What dost Thou Do upon Sunday?' Just at the moment I put it in, Professor Nabs happened to be playing very wildly upon the pianoforte, so I thought I might venture to ring the bell slightly, and wait to see what would be the result.

"The servant must have taken it straight upstairs, for only a minute had elapsed when the piano stopped; but an instant afterwards, to my great surprise, the keys were banged loudly about in all directions, making a most deafening and disagreeable noise; and Professor Nabs began calling out again and again the very name of the tract I had just given in: 'What dost Thou Do upon Sunday?'

"I went away very much disheartened; but I have since heard from a friend of mine at the University—to whom I did not, of course, communicate any of the foregoing—that the improvisation of anthems has lately become a favourite pastime of Professor Nabs. I was very much consoled to hear this, as I had thought he simply meant to insult me.

"A week after this, however, when I was just in the act of leaving another tract at his door in the same manner, it opened suddenly, and a servant said he had been told to give the depositor of these tracts his master's thanks and compliments, and the housemaid was now supplied with plenty of waste-paper for several months to come.

"Last Saturday —— all the members know what took place last Saturday! However, as it is down on the books, I may as well repeat it.

"Last Saturday, after dark, the Flower Mission met by arrangement, and went out in a body to Professor Nabs' house, St. Peter's Cliff. They settled themselves into a careless group upon the green bank under his windows, and sang in chorus that most effective and

impressive hymn—'Black, Black, Black, as thou art.' As you all know, however, scarcely was the first verse finished when Professor Nabs thrust his head out of the window, and waving his hands in a most rude fashion, called out 'Go away; go away.' I am bound to state, however, that I have since heard Mr. Spence, the geologist, and Mr. Kingston, the astronomer, were just then engaged on a scientific consultation with Professor Nabs in his drawing-room.

"That is all the Society has to report, so far, upon the subject of the conversion of Professor Nabs."

Miss Smith resumed her seat. There was a momentary pause of indecision. Suddenly, the little lady tapped for attention, and pushing her chair back, rose. "I beg to move," said she, "that this Mission shall sit in absolute silence for five minutes, during which it shall be each member's duty to do her utmost to think of what should next be attempted for the conversion of Professor Nabs. At the end of the five minutes, all can speak."

The motion having been unanimously carried, each member buried her head in her hands, and all began to think earnestly.

Amongst the six Flower Missionaries there was one poor creature.

She was not at all poor in the ordinarily accepted sense of the word; but there was a certain confusion of ideas upon general subjects, and entire absence of all detail regarding geography, history, and arithmetic, as well as an utter want of *manliness*, so to speak, which had very soon brought the other members of the Mission to a unanimous conclusion that Miss Isabella Linn was but a poor creature. She would have fainted from sheer nervousness if she had had to read the reports, like Miss Smith, or to address the meeting, like the little woman, Miss Pointer. And, besides that, she was actually pretty, in a fair, delicate, old-fashioned sort of way, which is, of course, a decided disadvantage to any woman upon even so limited a sphere of the higher walks of life as Flower Missions. She was only a poor creature, with a large house and garden, and a kindly heart.

Thus, it came to pass that at the end of the five minutes, when one stood up and proposed one thing, and another stood up and proposed another thing, Miss Isabella Linn sat silent and blushing in her place. For, to begin with, she had not been able to think of anything; and, secondly, if she had, she would never have summoned up courage enough to propose it.

And yet, so strange are the workings of Providence, and the ways of Nature, that out of all the six, there was not one who took Professor Nabs' case so seriously and bitterly to heart as Miss Linn.

Like many another and more famous woman, if she had but little intellect, she had a mighty faith; and so, all through the long balmy night following that meeting, little Miss Linn tossed aud retossed upon her bed, all for the sake of poor unworthy benighted Professor Nabs. And just when the cold, grey dawn began to creep in, she came

to such a tragical resolve, that the very horror of it made her bury her fair little head under both pillows, and soon she was fast asleep.

When she got up in the morning, her feelings were, doubtless, much the same as those experienced by Jerome of Prague and John Huss a few minutes before their execution; only that theirs, of course, could not have been half so fearful, because they were Jerome of Prague and John Huss, whereas this was only little Miss Isabella Linn, a poor creature.

At half-past ten o'clock she put on her new lavender print, and her white muslin hat, with the buttercups in the front of it; and having filled a large basket with the choicest lilies of the valley and white lilac in her garden, sallied out by the back way to Professor Nabs'.

Now, it so happened that Professor Nabs had received by that morning's post a letter, signed by four bishops, earnestly entreating him to suppress a certain number of a certain pamphlet, issued by him to the students of Chumbleton University; and as he had not the faintest intention of doing such a thing, he was necessarily in high good humour, and thought he felt very much like having a tune upon the piano. Therefore, when the message came upstairs that there was a lady waiting to see him upon important business, he was a little ruffled. Still he said he would see her. He happened to drop his music just as the door opened, and had said a very reprehensible expression three times over, before he dropped it again with a deliberate bang, his mouth going up, up, in the new-moon shape, and his whole little self expanding with indignation. The poor creature's face and lips had turned whiter than her own lilies, and it seemed as if all the starch had come out of the lavender print. After an instant of terrific pause on either side, she managed to take a faltering step forwards, and stammered, holding out the heavy basket with one of her small, shaking hands by way of opening the conversation:

"I—I—have brought you—some—flowers."

It is probable that in the whole course of his long life, Professor Nabs had never been so much surprised. That any human being should be so incomprehensibly extraordinary as to offer a basket of lilac and lilies of the valley to a man whose four acres of garden were literally teeming with them, was in itself sufficiently astounding; and, of course, the way and manner of the offering was a hundredfold more so. There was a pause of one other instant, during which the basket continued to shiver in the outstretched hand of Miss Linn; then, very suddenly, the new-moon mouth came down with a jerk, and Professor Nabs advanced, and took it into his own.

"Oh," said he; "thank you. My glasses have just gone down to be washed; but I dare say they'll come up by-and-bye. Sit down."

She did so, upon the very edge of a wicker-work chair, and there ensued another awkward pause. Then Professor Nabs made a grab at the music on the floor, and settled it once more upon the piano.

"I was just going to sing something when you came in," said he; "and if you don't mind, I'll just still do so."

"Thank you," replied the flower-missionary; so with a tremendous shout and a bang, Professor Nabs struck the first chords of "Bonnie Dundee," and thundered on through all the three verses.

"Ah," said he, "I like that tune. It's nice and loud. I don't like many Scotch tunes, but I like that one."

"I like loud tunes, too," faltered Miss Linn. "I have a set of "Bonnie Dundee" marked F. F. all through; but I can never get it loud enough."

"F. F. all through," exclaimed Professor Nabs, with interest. "Dear me! I should like to see that set. Most extraordinary that I should never have come across it. It is a pity you can never get it loud enough," continued he, "but—I think I might manage it."

"I dare say," replied Miss Linn; and added, with a great blush: "There are some nice hymns at the end of the same book."

"O—h, indeed!" said he, opening his eyes slightly. "Well, you might lend me that book, and if the hymns are F. F. too, perhaps I'll have a bang at them also. Pray, are you the young lady who hangs about my house and leaves tracts at the door?"

"N—no," faltered Miss Linn.

"Oh, you're *not*," said Professor Nabs, running his hands up and down the piano, and covering her with a piercing flash of his raven eyes. "Then who are you?"

She twisted and untwisted her hands, and grew as white as her lilies again. "I—I am Miss Isabella Linn, a Flower Missionary to the Incurables."

"What Incurables?" asked Professor Nabs, with sudden interest.

Now, it is a trait of character common to all poor creatures, that if they have a hobby, they are sure to be able to talk about it. Therefore, as Miss Linn's hobby was undeniably the Incurables, the very mention of their name made, as it were, another woman of her, and she at once began with comparative ease.

"I go to the Incurables every week. There are thirty of them—fourteen men and sixteen women. Only seven out of the thirty are able to go to church. There is one old gardener's wife, who has been there for forty-two years, and all that time she has never seen a tree. There is an old man, John Thomson, who used to play a barrel-organ in the street twenty years ago; but he fell down a gas-hole in the dark at the time of the Prince of Wales's marriage, and he has never been out of bed since. The matron says he still wanders in his sleep about barrel-organs, although he has never again heard the sound of one."

"Mercy on me!" faltered Professor Nabs. "And haven't they a piano?"

"Oh, no, indeed," replied Miss Linn glibly; "and even if they had, I don't think there is anyone who could play it to them. There

is a tannery on one side, and a Salvation Army Hall on the other ——"

"That ought to be lively, now," interposed the Professor.

"They don't seem to like it," answered she, a little dubiously. "Perhaps the meetings are not very musical." And noticing, poor creature as she was, that Professor Nabs' raven eyes had suddenly begun to sparkle through a mist of dimness, she added gently: "Perhaps you would rather I didn't talk any more about the Incurables."

He raised himself with a brisk movement, and thundered the scale of C from end to end of his piano. "My dear," said he, a little indistinctly on account of the noise, "my mother was an incurable."

"I am exceedingly interested about the barrel-organ man," he resumed, after a minute. "Why in the world don't they provide him with a barrel-organ? Why in the world don't they provide them all with a piano?"

"I have told you that, even if they had one," replied Miss Linn, "I don't think there is anybody who would be able to play it to them. I suppose," added she, quite unexpectedly to herself, as if illuminated by a sudden flash of inspiration, "*you* wouldn't play for them sometimes?"

As soon as she had spoken, she almost fainted at her own audacity. It did not, however, appear to have any particularly alarming effect upon Professor Nabs. He sighed deeply, and ran his fingers fitfully up a chord or two.

"I—I am not accustomed to playing in public," he said at length.

"Would—would it make you nervous?" asked she, timidly.

"I don't know," replied Professor Nabs, getting rather red, and taking up the question with great seriousness. "I have played occasionally to a friend of mine, Mr. Spence, and I offered to play to Mr. Kingston the other day, but he refused, not being musical. My window is also very often open when I play, but I don't suppose anyone remarks me. I also played to you.—But what is all this going to lead to?" added he abruptly, and rather loudly.

The poor creature was startled, and it doesn't do to startle poor creatures. Her lips began to quiver, and, instead of giving a precise answer to such a precise question, as she ought to have done, she gave no answer at all.

Now, the one thing that Professor Nabs could not abide was silence. Miss Linn's silence at once put him out of sorts to such an extent that he repeated his question with quite a shout and in a still more undesirable form.

"What are you doing here?"

It doesn't do to shout at poor creatures. It fairly terrified this one all to pieces. She had just time to raise herself slightly in order to get her handkerchief out of the pocket of her lavender print dress, and in her agony of confusion she simply told the whole truth.

"I belong to the Flower Mission," she began, her voice quavering

and her heart beating, "but, at the same time, we have a Secret Mission and it is the Conversion of Professor Nabs.—Oh, Professor Nabs!" continued poor Miss Linn, who had now fairly broken down, and held her handkerchief to her eyes: "if you would only reform! If you would only take to good ways, and come to church on a Sunday. You have time yet; you don't know how soon it may be too late. And—— and——*this* is why I'm here—to tell you this."

There was a dead pause of an instant, and then Professor Nabs began to laugh. Yet not unkindly; almost, it seemed, as if he saw a great deal of humour in all this, and was immensely tickled by it.

"Poor creature!" exclaimed he at last.

"I know that," replied Miss Linn, from behind her pocket-handkerchief.

"This is a new idea," continued the Professor grimly; "the opening of a new and a great field," waving his hand slightly towards the open window. "I have heard of many missions, for the conversion of many heathen, but this is the first time I *ever* heard of a mission for the conversion of a Professor of Mathematics. But," he continued more snappishly, "it won't come to anything. Secret things never do, any more than silent things. So you want me to go to church, do you? My dear, kind creature," continued he, in a graver tone, "don't trouble or distress yourselves about me. I was beyond conversion half a century before you were born"—which was a direct libel upon himself, for Professor Nabs was only just turned forty. "I, too, am an old, old incurable."

She pricked up her ears at the word, and dried her blue eyes.

"If you please that is because you don't go to church," she replied illogically. "It is in a large seat not far from the side-door that the Incurables sit. They come in always just in time for the sermon. There is old Roger Bryan, with the twisted spine, and quite blind. They lead him in, and he has a very bad temper, somehow. The man who always leads him died last week, though. And there's that man's sister, a girl with a white face, and a great lot of yellow hair. And they say she'll soon be dead too. Old Mrs. Hodge, with the black shawl, looks so well that you really never would think she hadn't any arms ——"

"I say," screamed Professor Nabs, raising himself suddenly, and bringing his hand down with a bang upon the piano, "what are you telling me all this for? I can't stand it, and I won't."

And before poor Miss Linn had recovered from the shock, he pranced over to the door, and held it open for her to pass out. Then, shuffling noisily downstairs after her, he threw open the front door, and all of a sudden, with a kindly action, laid a detaining hand upon the lavender print dress.

"My dear," said he, "I won't have any Secret-Missions converting me. If that Flower-Mission wants to convert me, why doesn't it say so openly? If it wants to convert me, it can tell the town so—and

so shall I; and it can ask me to go to church with it; and, just for once in a way, I *will* go to church with it. Nobody shall ever have it in their power to say that Professor Nabs refused to encourage a new idea. But as for more young women hanging about my doors, and sticking tracts in my letter-box, I object to the thing on principle, and won't have it. And now you can go home and tell the rest of them that from me."

It was Sunday morning, and the bells of St. Peter's were ringing for church. A fine, sunshiny day; the little white clouds sped merrily away over the laughing blue sky; the little birds were twittering in and out of the green banks bordering Cliff Road; the lilacs and the hawthorns were smelling at all the corners; the yellow sand of the church square kept firm in its place in spite of the breeze, for there had been a shower last night, and it was still damp. The great budding laburnum in the middle of the square nodded its golden pods to and fro; and, meantime, the bells rang out up above in the tower of St. Peter's.

Inside the church the long ruby and green and fawn-coloured beams were lighting up the battered plaster saints, and glorifying the pure indestructible marble, and glaring fiercely at the red cloth of the clumsy organ-gallery. It was nearly eleven, and most of the high-backed pews were comfortably filled. Little old women had begun to turn over the leaves of their aged prayer-books; respectable heads of families fastened their eyes dreamily on the big wooden cross over the entrance to the chancel, and thought of to-morrow's expenses; their flippant sons and daughters looked at each other. And two or three, dotted sparingly about, were remembering that they had come to pray; but even they had a general idea that it was oppressively hot; and that the lilacs and laburnums were smelling sweetly outside.

By-and-bye the organ began to speak, and went thundering and singing eloquently to itself in a way so utterly beyond and superior to everything else in the church—except perhaps the old brown battered saints lit up by the glowing beams of the windows—that even the little old women shut their prayer-books, and listened with bent heads and hushed breath.

Just as the bell stopped and eleven tolled out, the vestry door opened, and the long double row of white choristers trooped briskly in. Then the prayer-books were opened again, and soon the whole congregation was declaring with one voice that it had done those things which it ought not to have done—which was indeed true.

It was just towards the middle of the Absolution that a noise in the middle aisle made every pew start round, as if impelled by one electric shock, and stare as they had probably never stared before. No wonder, either: knowing, as they did, nothing about the Flower Mission, and less than nothing about the Mission for the Conversion of Professor Nabs.

First of all, there was little Miss Linn, in her white muslin and buttercup hat. She looked half dead with fright, her big, pretty blue eyes wandering all around her in a terrified, agonising sort of way, her whole manner saying as plainly as possible, "Here's Professor Nabs." Next there were three members of the Flower Mission—three earnest young women: one short and flabby, who plodded over the tiles with fat, noisy steps, another who turned her toes in, and a third with long earrings, who, having some idea of elegance, advanced with hands drooping from the wrist, and long up-and-down steps like a camel's. Thirdly, there was Miss Smith, who settled her eye-glass all the way up, and Miss Pointer, who hid her shame behind her pocket-handkerchief. Last of all, there was—Professor Nabs.

All the rest of this strange scene went for nothing in the minds of the spectators, as soon as their startled senses drank in the fact that before them, in flesh and blood, was Professor Nabs. He pranced triumphantly after Miss Smith and Miss Pointer, his yellow-green hat in one hand, a very large prayer-book and hymn-book held prominently in the other. The ruby beams played on his big, snow-white brow, as he passed by the brown saints in the niches. It quite seemed as if these battered saints were lending a little of their borrowed lustre to him.

Up the long aisle went Miss Linn, and made a violent dash into the two big empty pews waiting for the Incurables, whither she was followed in due course by the rest of the Flower Mission and Professor Nabs. By this time the congregation had so far recovered from their surprise as to be able to return to their devotions.

If there was one thing that St. Peter's prided itself in more than another, it was the singing of the choir. The congregation would as soon have thought of joining in the Rector's part of the Litany, as of joining in the singing. To Professor Nabs, however, who knew none of these things, it seemed that all this rising and falling of the voices was but a very poor affair; and by way of, as he mentally expressed it, helping them on a bit, he struck up with such a lusty and discordant shout, that the little boys of the choir giggled outright, and the elder members of it turned crimson from shame and discomfiture.

Professor Nabs, however, thought he was getting on nicely. The organ exhilarated him, being so much louder than anything he could produce from the piano, so that he excelled even the wildest of his every-day efforts. He had all the abandon of a great artist, too, and was so much carried away by his own enthusiasm during the psalms, that he shook his head and emphasized himself from first to last, generally coming in a little too late at the end of each verse. Indeed, he was so much struck with the advantages possessed by the organ over the piano as an accompanying instrument, that he sat quite quietly all through the reading of the first lesson, busy with an abstruse calculation as to how much income he would lose, how much interest he would have to pay, and how big a lump sum it would cost,

to buy an organ as large as this one of St. Peter's, and to build an organ-chamber for it behind his drawing-room. He was thus alike oblivious to the curiosity of the congregation, the burning indignation of the Rector, and the blushes of the Flower Mission. By the time the second lesson began, however, he had made up his mind that the organ scheme was impossible; and as Miss Linn happened to be sitting next him, he thought he might as well point out a few of the most glaring architectural delinquencies to her, until little Miss Linn was so terror-stricken that she almost went straight off into hysterics.

The prayers came to an end, and just as the Rector mounted into his pulpit, the side door opened, and the seven poor Incurables came tottering in. It was a strange practice this, probably instituted by the Rector. To more than one of the Incurables it seemed as if they had begun at the wrong end of the service; but very possibly the Rector thought it was an easy thing to say prayers at home: whereas it was an exceedingly difficult thing to listen to a sermon such as he could deliver, in the wards of an Incurable Hospital.

They were seven respectable, faint and weary-looking Incurables; there was plenty of room for their poor, tired limbs in the long pews, even without crushing Professor Nabs and the six Flower Missionaries.

Professor Nabs! What had come over him? From the first moment his eyes lighted on the white faces and distorted forms, the grin upon his face had died like a beam of sunshine at the coming of snow. And even as Miss Linn brightened up, and began to look about her a little, shadows of darkness gathered about his white brow, and pain quivered around the eyes. Until by-and-bye he began to clasp and unclasp his hands, and to mutter and shake his head to himself, until the surrounding pews were divided in feeling as to whether they should break out into tears or into laughter.

There was one old woman who particularly seemed to fascinate him. He turned his eyes upon her, then shut them spasmodically; only to open them and fasten them upon her again: a whole world of concentrated pain in their eloquent black depths. And as time and the sermon went on he grew only the more violently agitated, waving himself about, and leaning his head down, until at last the whole church was trembling with excitement to know what would happen next.

They knew before very long. All of a sudden he raised himself, and stammering something to Miss Linn, crushed his way past her, and the other Missionaries, and the poor Incurables, and fled down the middle aisle out of the church, banging the big oak door behind him.

It was all so sudden that for fully three minutes after he was gone neither Rector, nor missionaries, nor congregation had been able to recover themselves. Besides which, even if they had been stones of

the ground, instead of stolid Englishmen, that poignant half-whisper stammered to Miss Linn, must surely, surely have been pathetic enough to move them:

"My mother was an Incurable."

So this was what came of earnestness! Poor Flower Missionaries! Deserted by Professor Nabs, they sat alone, covered with shame and contumely; the butts of the whimsical, the observed of all observers, from the Rector down to the Incurables themselves.

Yes; but the next morning!

The next morning Professor Nabs paid a visit to the stuffy little Incurable Hospital. Half an hour afterwards it was known all through Chumbleton that he had delivered over his big, old-fashioned roomy house, and big, sweet-smelling garden, and comfortable furniture and piano, all—for henceforth and for evermore—to the Incurables. In the morning he took a small lodging for himself in St. Peter's Square; and, to the immense disconcertment of the organist of St. Peter's, a big back pew in the organ gallery. The Flower Missionaries felt just a little better when these things happened in the morning.

Day after day the Incurables sat about the sweet lawns, and under the shady trees, breathing forth one long chorus of blessings to Professor Nabs. Sunday after Sunday Professor Nabs roared to his heart's content, under the very shadow of the organ, and then watched the Incurables from afar with twinkling eyes; while the people in the pews below whispered to any strangers who might happen to be with them: "That's Professor Nabs; I'll tell you afterwards about—the Conversion of Professor Nabs."

What if there were some people hard-hearted enough to say that they did not believe in his conversion at all? And what if there were others strange enough to think he must have been converted all along? The most and the wisest held up their hands in amazement, that a great and a wicked man, like Professor Nabs, could have been converted by the like of a Flower Mission, and little Miss Isabella Linn—a poor creature.

A poor creature! Everybody wondered, after a little, how they could have made such a mistake. Early one sultry autumn morning, Professor Nabs removed again; this time to a larger house with a larger and even sweeter garden than his own had been. Professor Nabs was married to Miss Linn, and went to live in Miss Linn's house. And after a time the house became not a bit too large for its inmates, and there was not a happier household in all the country round. Well, the Chumbleton people were getting used to surprises! A poor creature indeed! Everybody bowed low to the great Mrs. Nabs; occasionally even adding with a sigh, which might mean many things:—"Ah! I used to know her as little Miss Isabella Linn."

No. I. OF THE FIRST BOOK.

THE room was one of those harmonious little bowers often seen in these æsthetic days. Nora had fallen in love with the description of a violet boudoir, and when her taste was consulted about her own boudoir she unhesitatingly declared it should be hung and furnished in shades of purple from the deepest to the palest, and it was done.

On this afternoon her own dress harmonised with the room. Violet silk and velvet trained over the purple carpet, and a band of sparkling amethyst violets bound her golden hair. Even the air was laden with the faint fragrance of the fresh flowers.

Nora was seated at the piano playing, while Philip Leighton leaned his fair head against the dark damask of an easy chair, and listened with half-closed eyes. His violin lay lovingly against his heart, and his long, slender "violin hand," still carelessly held the bow.

"Play No. I. of the Lieder," he said, as she paused, with a faint, inquiring chord; "the one they call 'Sweet Remembrance.'"

She shivered slightly, and opened her lips to refuse, then resolutely turning, she began to play. Philip's eyes were open now, and he watched her closely, as, with tight-shut mouth and sad, strained eyes, she played it through with rare feeling, but evident pain. Like a flash, there passed through his mind the thought of a cruel wind driving before it two forms with faces he knew. As the last note died away Nora rose so pale and wan that Philip started to his feet, looking at her in surprise; but almost instantly her colour returned, and she laughed lightly.

"I once read," he said, quietly, as he re-seated himself in his purple chair, "a very strange story about everyone having a key-note. A certain note in the scale dominated over them in some mysterious fashion, and everyone who discovered this possessed a singular power over the person who responded to it. The story pretended that this was universal. I think it fanciful myself, though I have never tried to prove it. I am certain, however, that I have found a combination of sounds which has a strange effect upon you, Nora. Why do you never play that piece without evident suffering?"

Again a slight shudder passed over her; but after a moment's hesitation, she replied, "I do not know. That it is so is true, and although I am unconscious of changing colour, I know that, too, is so; for after playing it, people have sometimes come up and offered me a fan or vinaigrette, as if they thought me faint."

"What does it make you think of?" he asked.

"Of the wind. Whoever named it 'Doux Souvenir' must have

had different ears from mine. It also makes me think of, or see, a picture."

"Representing ——?"

"Two shadowy figures driven by the wind. Such sad, sad looks they turn one on the other; but sadness full of longing, lingering love."

This time he, too, turned pale. He rose. "My dear Nora," he said, "this is growing absurd. Absolutely I begin myself to shiver. Come, accompany me; let us play it together."

Complying at once, she went to the piano. Once or twice she raised her eyes to his face beseechingly, as if imploring him to stop; but he was mercilessly determined to fight away this "something," and he held her to the very last. Softly, faintly, the murmuring wind-sounds died away, until they blended into silence; but as he turned to chide her playfully, her eyes looked dimly into his, then closed as she fainted in his arms.

Neither had noticed her father, who, drawn by the music, had been standing in the curtained doorway. He hurried in as his daughter fell, and taking her somewhat abruptly from Philip's arms, said a word to him, and the young man retired. A moment after, Nora opened her eyes in vague wonder, and, seeing her father's face, could recall nothing of what had passed. He gently explained.

"I was just going to call your mother," he added; "but since you are better—come, take a turn up and down with me; there now, your colour is coming. Nora, I will take this opportunity to say that I do not wish you to see so much of Philip."

"O papa, he had nothing to do with my fainting—nothing at all."

"Do you know," said her father, slowly, "all the circumstances of Philip's life?"

"No!" she answered, frankly; "I do not. I only know there is something painful in his past about which no one speaks."

"It concerns a woman," began her father, and then he hesitated.

"Papa," said Nora, "if you wish to tell me anything, whatever it may be, do not be afraid of agitating me. Philip has never made love to me—is nothing to me, as you seem to fear."

"Ah, then," in a tone of relief, "you ought to know the story. Philip is married, and his wife is supposed to be living."

In spite of herself, Nora shivered and turned pale.

"Well, when did this happen? Please tell me all," she said, as quietly as she could.

"It isn't a long story, and it's not a very romantic one. He was drawn into the thing when a college youth. He married his landlady's daughter privately; and six months after she ran away with his most intimate friend. All this before his college course was ended. He took no steps to trace his wife, and there the matter has rested."

"I am glad you told me this, papa," Nora said, simply. "One ought to be posted up on these matters."

Her manner then and after was so calm that her father congratulated himself on his timely revelation. "I might have been too late," he said to himself.

Days passed. Philip did not appear. Then one day a package came for Nora, containing a very small copy of "Doux Souvenir," exquisitely bound in violet. From the pages dropped a note:

"NORA,—I have seen your father, who tells me you know all; this has brought me to a sense of my own peril, and I feel I dare not meet you again.—PHILIP."

Nora told herself she should not, would not care, and she forced herself to be brave; but she did care, for all that, and she laid away "Doux Souvenir"—ah! "Triste Souvenir," and never played it now. Still her life went on the same; and one evening she found herself in the artist's reception, in company with some friends. Exquisitely dressed groups passed up and down before the beautiful pictures, the air was filled with sweet sounds and the scent of rare flowers, and Nora was almost forgetting to feel sad. There was a pause in the music, and her friends were chattering gaily around her, when softly, sweetly from an adjoining room came the sounds of "Doux Souvenir." Turning quickly, Nora met Philip's eyes.

He stepped forward. "I must speak to you this once," he said.

With a word of excuse to her friends, she took his offered arm, and walked with him up and down, always within sound of the song.

"Nora," he whispered, passionately. "I cannot keep away from you—I cannot live without you. Speak one word to strengthen me, to comfort me."

But the same set look was on her face, and she stopped suddenly. Her eyes were fastened on a picture hanging near. Two shadowy forms driven by a terrible, cruel wind, and the low, sad, moaning of the song might have been the sound of its passing.

His sad eyes followed hers, his face, too, grew deathly white.

"I accept the portent," he sighed: "I take the warning. Come away, Nora, come away. Oh, come!"

"No," she answered, dreamily; "I would rather stay."

"Nora," he pleaded, "won't you listen to me? I implore you, for my sake, if you will not for your own."

"I cannot move," she whispered; "something holds me to the spot."

A look of torture passed over his face, followed by one of sudden relief, as a young artist passed close to him. "Ernest!" he said, addressing him, "quick! stop that music. I will explain later—only be quick!"

An exclamation of surprise and pain escaped the artist's lips; but the next moment he dashed forward, saying: "The lady has fainted! Here, this way; I will show you." He threw wide a small door beside

them, which had been concealed by a heavy curtain, and opened into a quiet room.

Philip carried in Nora and laid her on a lounge, while the other hastened to admit the air. Then while she lay restored, but white and still, too weak to open her eyes, she heard the stranger say: "Philip, old friend, forgive me if you can. I loved her; you did not."

Philip only answered quietly: "Where is she now?"

"Dead," groaned the artist; "dead two months since. You never cared for her, and I would have given my life to save her. Do not excuse my sin. I only ask your pardon."

Nora opened her eyes to see Philip lay his hand in that of the man who had so heartlessly betrayed him.

"I forgive you now," she heard him say. "I once thought I never should. You painted the Francesca di Rimini?"

"Yes. You noticed the likeness? And did you read the repentance and misery that could only paint such anguish?"

"I think I did," he answered.

Nora rose. "Did you paint that lovely, beautiful picture?" she asked, turning to the artist.

He bowed.

"I cannot think," she sighed, passing her hand over her brow, "how it is possible; but that is what has haunted me for years when I played "Doux Souvenir," until the notes have come to sound like storm winds, and I could see so plainly those weary forms drifting hither and thither—one, ah! one was like you, only a shadow, and the other ——"

"She is dead now," he said, hoarsely; "let her rest."

Nora turned gently, and gave him her hand. "I am sorry for you," she said.

Then Philip drew her away. Without a word he took her back to her friends, made his adieux, and left. She did not see him again for months. Then one day, when she was in her violet room, he came.

"I want to try an experiment," he said, after greeting her. "Have you ever played 'Doux Souvenir' since that night?"

"Never," she replied.

"Do so now."

Norah shrank and shivered.

"I am certain the spell is gone," he said. "You have seen the picture in reality. You will not fear it now."

Then she obeyed. First came the hushed prelude, next the sighing, tender song, then the wailing sadness of the closing phrase; but her face no longer paled, a bright flush covered her cheeks, perhaps because Philip's arm was held around her, while her happy head leaned on his breast.

LITTLE MAID OF ARCADIE.

I.

THE evening sun is shining on her bright hair, and his horizontal beams would blind her eyes, but she is shading them with her small, brown hand. "I don't believe he is coming at all," she says, half-aloud, with a little pout. "It's very tiresome of him! But I'll just go a little way down the hill."

A glad voice comes up from under the dark shadow of the trees, calling her name. The light in her eyes prevents her seeing who it is, but she knows it is the man she came to meet. She sits calmly down on the bank by the road-side and fans herself with a huge piece of bracken. Love lends wings to the man's feet, and he approaches at an amazing rate.

"How good of you, Phyllis, to meet me," he exclaims. "I never expected to see you."

She goes on with her fanning quite briskly.

"It is dreadfully hot and dusty," she remarks, by way of exaggerating her goodness, ignoring *his* state of heat and dustiness, the result of his eagerness to reach her side.

"Then it is all the kinder of you."

"But I only came because there was nothing to do at home."

His face falls. "Haven't you a hand to give me, Phyllis?" he asks, quite humbly.

"George, you know how I hate shaking hands! And, besides it is too late now. Shaking hands is the *first* thing you do when you meet a person. I was wondering why you didn't offer to do it before."

"Phyllis," he exclaims, despairingly, "why it was you yourself who ——"

"Indeed, it was no such thing!" she cries, indignantly. "I came to meet you all in this dust," holding out her pretty foot, finely powdered all over, "and I sat here waiting for you, and you came up, and never *attempted* to shake hands. If you are going to be cross, unjustly, I shall wish you were in London again!"

He knows of old how hopeless it is to argue with his pretty, disdainful cousin. "I have been in London a whole week!" he says, sadly. "It seems as though I had been months away from you."

"Dear me," she remarks, airily, "Does it? Then I suppose you did not enjoy going to London?"

"Enjoy it!" the simple fellow says, "how can I be happy away from you? Surely, you can see I don't look overwhelmed with happiness?"

"Now I look at you," giving him the merest glance, "you *do* look dull and—tired. But you see me now, don't you?" with a teasing, bewitching smile. "You have been staring at me for full *five* minutes! and how often have I told you how very rude it is of people to stare!"

He acknowledges the correction by guiltily turning his head away.

"If you are so tired," almost kindly, "why don't you sit down, pray?" He meekly accepts the offered place by her side.

"It is very odd," she muses, "that you should miss me so much. Now, when you're away I don't feel a bit lonely."

"I *know* you don't!" he cries, half-rising, stung beyond endurance, "Phyllis, don't you care for *anybody?*"

"O, yes," she retorts, saucily; "I love my father, and Tibby, and sometimes—when you aren't cross—I like you!"

He sits up and vainly tries to look into her lovely grey eyes. "Will you *ever* like me well enough to marry me?" he says at last, tempting his fate like many a man before him.

"Marry!" springing to her feet. "Why will you always tease, George? Haven't I forbidden you to say anything about such a thing? and you know when I said I would marry you, I meant in years and years."

"You don't think of me," the unlucky lover pleads. "If you had any heart at all you would take pity on me. And remember, if you *will* cause so much misery some of it is sure to return to you."

"There, now you have lost your temper again, I declare! If this is the way you go courting, what a husband you will make!"

"I don't know what makes me love you so much," he says, disconsolately, "you always quarrel with me. And why I'm unhappy away from you, I can't think, because you always make me wretched when I'm with you."

"Then don't come to me," gaily; "keep away! I told you before, I didn't miss you."

"Won't you say *one* kind word to me, Phyllis?" he entreats her. "All this last week I have comforted myself with the thought, 'Perhaps she will smile at me and speak kindly to me when I go back,' and now——O, Phyllis, what wouldn't I give if only you would love me a little!"

"Only a minute ago I told you I liked you *very much* when you weren't cross, and if you will promise not to say disagreeable things for a whole week—you know you say a week is such a long time—I will try to—to——"

"To what?" cries the incautious swain, the light of hope making his dark, passionate face look handsome.

"To forgive you for those you *have* said," the saucy maiden finishes, ungraciously, a minute after smiling most sweetly and innocently into his face which has grown so dark.

"Phyllis, you are heartless! I shall never know a day's happiness till you love me or I hate you!" He drops her hand, and without looking at her, turns to go.

"I *was* going to walk with him——" she says, slowly, apparently addressing a swallow that skims by. The much-enduring man turns eagerly. How completely she has him at her mercy.

"—— But I shan't now; oh, no!"

He moodily walks away again.

"Father wants you to come in this evening, George," she goes on, with a sudden assumption of friendliness, bringing him again to a standstill; "and *I* want you too," with the kindest of looks from the lovely grey eyes. "You haven't told me a word about London yet."

She turns away as she speaks, and springs lightly over the stile into the field, leaning over it to call to him. "Be sure you come, George; and don't bring that little black dog on your shoulder!" With a ringing laugh she lightly runs away.

Just as she reaches the next stile somebody else reaches it from the other side. She looks up, and her eyes encounter evident admiration in those of a well-dressed, handsome young man. He draws back slightly, and raises his cap.

"You were just going to get over the stile," he says, politely.

"And so were you!" she returns, partly to gain time. She has no fancy for climbing stiles with people looking on, especially, she feels, rather than thinks, this handsome stranger.

"Perhaps there is no need for me to do so. Can you tell me if this is the right way to the 'Magpie and Stump'?"

She ponders. Then she gives him directions so lengthy and complicated that the gigantic memory of a Macaulay would scarcely avail to hold them.

"I am very sorry," he says, apologetically, when she pauses, having landed him in imagination at the "Magpie and Stump;" but I am afraid I cannot remember one single thing!"

She repeats them, as briefly as possible. He protests his head is far too stupid to carry so much. Will she not come a little way, a very little way, to show him till he can find it for himself? His smile is so winning and his tones so honied, that:

"What time is it?" she asks, coming half a step nearer.

He unblushingly understates the hour by a full quarter.

"If only it wasn't so awkward and high," she murmurs, as a last faint protest, looking askance at the stile which divides them.

"We can easily manage that," he assures her. "See!" And in an instant he has helped her over.

"You are a stranger here, sir?" she asks, shyly, for the enormity of her conduct, in thus walking in the lonely fields with a stranger, suddenly reveals itself to her.

"Yes, I am down for some fishing." Then, seeing she instinctively looks for fishing-rods, he adds: "I have only just come—by the last

train—and I have lost my way in a maze of fields. Have you *no* roads down here?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I had just come from a road when I met you at the stile."

"And where does it lead to?"

"Only to my father's farm—Elmsover Farm."

"And is there any good fishing?"

"Yes," she says, "there are three good trout streams." But she is suddenly shy; this man is so far above her. He is a young god to her, as Theseus was to Ariadne. A few minutes later she stops.

"I think you will find your way now," she says, pointing down into the valley. "See. That white house is the inn."

"I ought to see you at least half-way home," he says, "it will soon be getting dusk, and you are alone——"

"Oh, no," promptly; "I am quite used to walk alone, and I shall be quite safe," inwardly wishing he would insist on accompanying her.

"Then, good-bye," he says; "and I have to thank my pretty little guide for a pleasant walk, besides her kind guidance."

She slowly raises her eyes, and, as she meets his admiring gaze, blushes deeply. All her thought on her homeward way is—"How different from George—how different from George!"

Alas, poor George!

II.

She stands with one finger pressed into her cheek, while the other hand holds aloft a white sun-bonnet, which she is regarding with high disdain.

"It look so very—*countrified*, she murmurs at last, in a tone of disgust. A movement of her arm, and the poor sun-bonnet flutters sadly to the floor, falling short of the bed at which it was aimed.

Her Sunday hat next undergoes inspection; a gorgeous erection, compiled by the best milliner in the place, and the admiration and envy of all the other village maidens. "I'm afraid—I'm afraid," she says slowly, "*he* would think it very—large, and—mixed!"

She finally dons the sun-bonnet, and Vanity whispers: "After all, it suits you best, and you won't get sun-burnt."

She walks up the shady lane, careful to look neither to the right hand nor to the left; not allowing, even to herself, that she hopes to see anybody.

"Where are you going to, my pretty maid?" sings a gay voice close to her, the remembrance of which has rung in her ears all night.

Looking up she sees *him*—the only name she knows him by.

"I am going blackberrying, sir."

"May I come, too?" persuasively; "I have not picked blackberries since I was a dirty little boy in jackets, and I don't suppose I

shall add much to your basket; but may I come?" He is not used to plead in vain.

"Yes, sir," with a swift, shy, upward glance. All her pretty imperious coquetry has take to itself wings.

"Then let us go at once. Give me your basket."

They walk on together, she vexed at not being able to chatter gaily as usual, and he thinking the country will not be so deplorably dull after all.

"You have not told me your name, child," he says, looking down from the hedge, as he throws blackberries into the basket she holds, thinking at the same time how exquisitely lovely is her upturned face.

"My name is Phyllis."

"It is a very pretty name, a sweet name, and it suits you to perfection."

"And your name—what is your name, sir?" she asks, chiefly to cover her confusion.

"You are not to call me 'sir.'"

"Why not, sir?"

"There you are again!" in pretended anger. "My name is Arthur Chesney, and, in future, child, mind you call me by it. It is absurd for you to say 'sir.'"

"Yes, sir." She makes him a little courtesy in mock humility.

How very sweet and *piquante* she is, he thinks. He has looked at her, so far, from a purely æsthetic point of view; but—how pleasantly he can while away his holiday ——

"Did you say you came down here to *fish*, Mr. Chesney?" she asks, presently. She is fast regaining the use of her glib little tongue.

"Yes. Don't I look as though I could fish? I used to flatter myself I was an angler born. However ——"

"But you *aren't* fishing," with a small attempt at her old pretty, contemptuous manner.

"Suppose I found something better to do?" he says, bending to see her under the sun-bonnet.

She timidly averts her eyes, while the crimson dyes her cheeks. Poor, ignorant child! how should she know how little the tender tone and look are in earnest?

"But I am going to begin business to morrow," he continues, selfishly enjoying her pretty confusion. "I am going to fish in the brook that skirts Millbrook Farm. So you see, Miss Phyllis, I am not always idle; and you must not curl up your lip so disdainfully, because I can work, I assure you!" pretending to be offended.

"Indeed I didn't, Mr. Chesney," she protests.

"But you did," he returns, appearing deeply hurt. "I didn't think it of you. I couldn't believe you would be so unkind."

"I wasn't," the simple child maintains, stoutly.

"Yes, I am really hurt," he continues; "you looked as though you

thought me an idle, good-for-nothing fellow. Come now, confess ——"

"No, I shan't."

"Perhaps, then, you thought me the best and handsomest man you ever saw?" This is too near the truth. She tosses her dainty head contemptuously.

"Indeed I never thought about you at all!" she declares, which is a lie on the face of it, Miss Phyllis, and you know it, and he knows it.

"Nay, that is the unkindest cut of all. Not once, really?"

"Oh, yes," carelessly, "once. When I got home and saw the clock, I thought how wrong your watch must be!"

"Did your mother scold you, then? Poor child! all through your kindness to me."

"I have no mother; and," proudly, "no one ever scolds me."

"Now, I will put you to the test. If you really and truly bear me no ill-will, you will come to-morrow and honour a lonely fisherman with your presence."

"The basket is filling very slowly," she remarks, gazing into it.

"Hang the basket!" Mr. Chesney exclaims; "will you come?"

"And do you suppose, Mr. Chesney," with great severity, "that I have nothing to do but to please myself?"

"Oh, you acknowledge it would please you ——"

"I really do think, Mr. Chesney," with a saucy little nod, "that you are quite as fond of having compliments paid to you as of paying them to people yourself!"

This is such a home-thrust that he says hastily; "I really shall think as I say if you won't come."

"George *did* ask me if I would like to get some water-lilies from the mill-pond," she says, slowly.

"Then come and gather water-lilies, like a sensible child."

"Perhaps ——" she says, and stops. "I will ask George if he can come to-morrow."

"No, no!" he says, at once, looking on this proposal with much disfavour; "don't ask George. I can get them for you."

"I'll see," she answers, wisely.

"I knew she would come," he says to himself next morning, by the brook-side. "What a sweet little thing she is!"

She comes slowly across the field in the brilliant sunshine, with her eyes carelessly fixed on the horizon. When she is within six yards of him she (apparently) first becomes aware of his presence, and gives a little start, as who should say, "I never thought to see *you* here!"

"Good morning, Mr. Chesney," politely.

"How d'ye do?" he says, jumping up and taking her little bare hand. No waiting for *her* to shake hands, as George does.

"Any fish, Mr. Chesney?" she asks, with interest.

"One, a beauty, just as you came."

"May I see it?"

"Well, it has taken the bait, though I don't know whether I shall be able to land it. But if you want to see it ——"

He leads her to the water-side, bids her look in, and she beholds—only her own beautiful face smiling up from the dimpling water.

"Oh, Mr. Chesney!" drawing back; "that is too bad. *You* are not a fisherman!"

"Indeed I am! I said I'd caught a beauty, and," triumphantly, "you can't deny it now you've looked in the brook!"

"You judge of fish by their *weight*," she says, severely; "and you can't say I'm *fat!*" as though defying contradiction, at the same time looking anxiously in his face. Suppose he should think her fat? Plump, she knows she is, but fat—oh!

"Heaven forbid!" with a shudder. "I have a horror of fat people. No indeed, little Phyllis, you are just right; you are perfection!"

"So George says," coyly, addressing her remark to the brook.

"George!" he cries, "who is this George" You are always talking of George. I am jealous of George. What right has he to say you are perfection?"

"I am going to marry him," she remarks, serenely, "and this is his farm," lifting little pebbles into the water with the toe of her shoe.

To do him justice he mutters to himself: "Then there must be an end to this pleasant fooling," and then an insane desire to supplant the luckless George in the affections of this lovely little ignoramus, seizes him, and grows, and grows.

"Do you like him?" he asks.

"Yes," calmly. "Oh, yes I like him when he is not cross!"

"And I suppose he adores you?" moodily.

"He would kill himself to please me," she says, quite as calmly, "and I'm sure I can't think why?"

"Phyllis," he suddenly says, but not so irrelevantly as it seems, "do you know how pretty you are? Long ago men would have fought for that sweet, little innocent face of yours. Do you know, I say, that you are perfectly lovely?"

"I ought to know it," demurely, "George says so often."

He utters a naughty word. "Don't talk to me of George," he cries, "I hate him!"

"Will you begin to *fish* now?" she enquires with feigned scorn. "I see you haven't even unpacked your rods!" at the same time seating herself comfortably on the trunk of an old fallen tree.

"Have you ever been to London, Mr. Chesney?" she asks, presently. London is almost more than heaven to her.

"Half the year," lazily, "I spend there."

She looks on him, if possible, with more admiration. He recounts to her its marvels, and she wonders secretly, bitterly, to herself, "Does he love any lovely London lady?"

"See, here is a beauty!" he cries, triumphantly, landing a fine trout.

"Ah, do show it me!"

He brings it. "Isn't it stunning."

"What lovely little red spots. Oh," with a little start, "it is alive. Poor thing."

Mr. Trout gives a desperate leap and lands in her lap. With a pretty little scream she picks it up daintily, puts it into the water, and it swims ungratefully away.

"Oh, Phillis, how *could* you?" he exclaims, with a true fisherman's disappointment; "you have lost my best fish!"

"I was so sorry for it," she confesses. "I am sure it didn't like being caught."

"Oh, they like it well enough," carelessly. "You are a dear tender-hearted little thing, but I do wish you had spared my best trout. It was a pound and a half, I'll swear."

"I did spare it," she retorts saucily, "that is just what I did do. But smell my hands!"

He takes a little brown hand in each of his own, and then, obeying a foolish impulse, he imprints a kiss on each.

Before he has time or inclination to release them, he perceives a horror growing in her eyes, that no action of his could warrant, while the rich colour dies away in her cheeks.

Following the direction of her gaze, he sees on the other side of the brook, a man, whose eyes, beneath scowling brows, are fixed on them and literally flashing with rage.

With a look of hatred, as though he would wither his rival, the stranger turns and strides away.

"Who is he?"

"*George*," she says faintly, with a lovely, guilty blush, while her downcast eyes avoid his.

"Confound him!" mutters Arthur Chesney.

III.

A FORTNIGHT has passed, a happy, long fortnight for little Phyllis, for has she not talked with her hero every day? Slowly too, it has passed with George, for he has been racked by jealous pains, and passionate love, and horrible hatred.

It is evening, and he has been walking a little way along the lane with her.

"Good-bye, George," she says, as they reach a gate, "this is my nearest way."

"Are you going to meet that fellow in those fields?" he asks, angrily.

"No, I am not!" she retorts, saving her conscience by thinking "I really *didn't* promise." "You know it is my nearest way home; and, besides," warmly, "if he should happen to be in the fields, it would be no more an appointment than my meeting you two minutes ago!"

She is moving away, but he seizes her by the wrist; not roughly, for in all his passion of anger and jealousy, he is tender and careful of her.

"Phyllis," he says hoarsely, "you have run away from me and avoided me all this last fortnight, but you *shall* hear me now! However much you may go on philandering with that fellow, it is *me* you'll marry."

"George," imperiously, "loose me at once! I shall not talk to you when you can't keep your temper."

"Temper!" savagely, "how can a man keep his temper, pray, when the girl he is going to marry does as you do?"

"But are you going to marry me?" gaily. "I'm not at all sure about it; I haven't made up my mind!"

"No other man shall have you, and marry me you shall and must!"

"Then you will be a dog in the manger, for *you* will not have me," trying to make her voice sound jaunty, but she is beginning to be afraid of him, and his grip has tightened on her wrist.

"I swear by Heaven that I will marry you."

"George, George," in a trembling voice, "don't swear, because I cannot marry you."

"I have your promise. You are bound in honour to marry me!"

She stands perfectly still, and her face is fixed and white. With cruel delight he watches her distress and misery. Jealousy has changed the whole nature of the man.

"*I hate you*, George," she hisses, under her breath.

"It is that confounded painted popinjay that has taught you to do so! *He*'ll never marry you!" he says, brutally.

Poor George! His wrongs are many.

If possible, she becomes whiter than before, and her hand trembles in his grasp. "Mr. Chesney is a gentleman," she says pointedly, with flashing eyes; "and I will never marry *you!*"—with ineffable scorn. "Never! Not to save your life. What is a promise, compared with a whole life of misery, as mine would be, married to you? Rather than that, I would kill myself!"

She trembles violently, and can scarcely command her voice.

"Take care I don't kill you first!" he cries bitterly. "I don't know whether I love you or hate you most."

He looks more like a fiend than a man, so contorted with passion is his face.

She recoils from him in horror. He flings her hand roughly away from him. With horrified, fascinated eyes still fixed on him, she goes slowly backwards to the gate. Once through, she runs till she can run no more, and then sinks on a rustic seat, in a passion of terrified weeping.

She knows not how long it is afterwards, when—

"Crying, little Phyllis!" the voice that she has learnt to love so well exclaims.

Arthur Chesney throws away his cigarette, and comes to her side. He tries to remove her wet hands.

"Who has made my pretty Phyllis cry?" he asks tenderly, smoothing her gold-brown hair.

"He—said—George—," she stammers, brokenly, between her sobs.

"What did he say to you, poor little Phyllis?"

"He—he was very angry with me, because he said—you ought not to—to talk to me." Her tears run afresh. "And I know," miserably, "I have been doing very wrong this last fortnight."

He does not speak.

"And he—he says he will *force* me to marry him."

"Well?" almost coldly. Is the girl cunning, and going to make him pay for his fortnight's amusement? or is she innocent, and only unhappy?

"And now—I *cannot!*" she says piteously, lifting her miserable, loving little face.

Her tears, her loveliness, and the passion of the moment, carry him beyond the bounds of prudence.

"Phyllis!" he suddenly cries, framing her sweet, tear-stained face in his hands. "Phyllis, do you love me? Do you?"

The lovely, timid eyes confess what he knows so well. The colour floods her delicate face, and her lips quiver. Never has she looked so lovely. With a muttered exclamation of, "My darling!" he catches her to his heart, and showers kisses on her burning face.

"My sweet little Phyllis," he murmurs, stroking her soft cheek. "It was worth having you cry, for the pleasure of comforting you. Now let me look at you. Why, you aren't the same child that you were two minutes ago?"

"Of course I'm not," shyly raising her glorious eyes, shining with new-born happiness and love, to his face.

"And why aren't you?" He has never dreamt she was so charming.

"Now I know you care for me," she says ingenuously, "I don't feel the same person at all. Not a bit."

"My sweetest Phyllis!"

"I'm sure I'm *not* Phyllis! I must pinch myself to see."

She pinches her soft, round arm, and all the red blood comes running to the spot, to see what can possibly be the matter.

He fondly presses his lips to the spot. "I sha'n't allow you to hurt yourself," he says.

"Nothing can hurt me—now," she answers softly, with a contented little sigh, looking up to him with perfect faith.

Those gentle, trustful eyes pierce to his very heart. Who is he, to ruin her fair young life? Half-an-hour later he bids her good-bye, and watches her run up the garden and disappear into the old farmhouse, after waving him a happy, loving farewell.

"What a brute I am," he says, enduring a pretty sharp prick of

conscience, as he walks away. "A perfect brute, to go and leave her—as I must," he sighs; and I know the mater has a match ready for me with Lady Florence. Pity I'm not rich enough to marry as I like. As I like, did I say? Well, she *is* a little darling, to play with down here in Arcadia; but in town, or at the Towers——. And now, I suppose, I must go away at once; and yet, she is so sweet and bewitching. No name on earth is too bad for me!"

But he does not go away at once. He stays "yet other three days," happy days spent with Phyllis, the voice of conscience comfortably stifled; and then he goes to stay with Lady Florence at the Towers.

He feels the most despicable and the meanest of mankind as he says good-bye to her, and sees the love in her trustful eyes, heavy with bravely-suppressed tears. Though he keeps saying to himself, "In a week she will forget me," yet he knows all the time she will never forget him; and he cannot be sorry for it, because the foundation-stone of his character is vanity, and vanity the coping-stone.

The days go by, and become weeks. Weeks lengthen into months.

Each Sunday she whispers bravely to herself, "This week I shall hear from him," and each Saturday, "Next week he is *sure* to write!"

Loving, trustful, deserted little Phyllis.

On Christmas morning she meets the postman with eager expectation. Surely to-day she will hear from him. Christmas-time is dedicated to the memory of absent friends. Alas, no letter; not even a little card.

"Then he is coming," she murmurs, with happy self-deception. So true and simple herself, another's faithlessness is inconceivable to her.

New Year's Day is here, and he has not come. George overtakes her coming home from church.

"Isn't it cold and bitter?" she says, shivering, in such a sad and quiet little voice.

"Not for winter-time. You never used to feel the cold, Phyllis."

"Oh, yes; I *always* hated winter."

"But you used to run and slide. You never do now."

"I am getting too old, you know, George," with a wan, wintry attempt at a smile.

"You are only nineteen."

"I think," sadly, "that we must all have made a great mistake, and I am really a hundred."

There is several minutes' silence, and then he says, humbly: "I can see now, Phyllis, how hopeless it is to want you to love me. Forgive me, dear, for having ever tormented you; but I loved you so madly. I will not persecute you any more. It is not that I love you less, but I pity you."

"It is for you to forgive me, George," softly. "You have a noble nature," striving to make her voice calm. "I know you now as I never knew you. I could have loved you, perhaps, if ——"

"Don't, Phyllis, don't. You break my heart!

Her only answer is a burst of tears.

Winter gives place to a sad, wet spring, and a white, patient Phyllis moves about her father's house and farm, never smiling, never singing, never complaining. It wrings George's true heart to see her so changed, so gently and patiently bearing her burden.

He is going to Australia, and constantly goes up to London, making necessary arrangements.

One March morning, when six weary months have dragged themselves on since that glorious September, she is going into the garden to gather the peeping primroses. As she passes the open door of the farmhouse parlour, she is arrested by hearing George's voice within. She thought he was in London.

"Ay, dead," he is saying, in hushed tones of awe; "dead as a stone."

What is this heavy sinking at her heart? Why should it have to do with her? She pauses, irresolute, a moment, and then, with trembling steps and ghastly, unreasonable forebodings, she enters the room.

"Poor child!" says her father, for he sees her white, drawn face. "Then you have heard?"

"Heard?" she almost gasps. "What, father?"

George says, brokenly: "A terrible accident happened to the night train from London—the train I came by—" and he hesitates.

"Well?" she says, with desperate calmness. "Go on." She leans heavily on the table.

He turns away his head, that he may not see her. "There were many people hurt, and—Mr. Chesney—was killed."

"I knew it! I knew it!" she cries triumphantly. "He was coming to me!" A glad light comes on her white face for one moment, and then her sorrow rushes on her. "Arthur," slowly and sadly, "I shall come to *you*."

And then, with a pitiful cry, that strikes terror to both their loving hearts, she falls to the ground. . . . .

She does not guess, and George cannot tell her, that there was with him a fair girl, a two days' bride—Lady Florence.

But she does not die. She lives, a sweet, sad, little Phyllis, not quite so child-like as before. As days go on, that wondrous fortnight lives in her memory as a happy, fairy-like dream.

Nearly two years have gone by since Phyllis said good-bye to George. She sits in the glow of the setting September sun. A tiny slip of printed paper is in her hand.

"I have kept it so long," she murmurs, half-aloud, "shall I destroy it? I think I will—no." She hears a footstep on the gravel, and instinctively crushes it into her pocket. She raises her head, and sees two loving eyes fixed on her.

"George!" With a joyous cry she springs towards him, holding out both hands. The traveller presses them gently, and then releases them.

"Yes, George," he says; "the wanderer, George."

"You must be very tired," the kindest of maidens retorts, "sit here by me."

"I never wish to leave this spot again," the weary man says, with two-fold meaning, which his little cousin clearly sees.

"And now," she commands him, "tell me all about Australia."

"About yourself first, little Phyllis," he says, the same as ever.

"Well, the very first thing worth telling—" she hesitates—"was nearly a year ago"—she shyly glances at him, and gives him a little bit of crumpled paper.

George reads the account of the marriage of Lady Florence Chesney, the young widow of the Honourable Arthur Chesney, who was killed in a railway accident two days after his marriage. He returns it.

"Yes, Phillis?" he says in a low voice, not looking at her.

"I—I am not a child any more," she murmurs, with averted head.

"Thank God!" George says, earnestly. The air seems brighter and the birds sing more sweetly.

There is silence for some minutes, and then she says, with a saucy glance: "And do you still hate me?"

"Hate you! I never hated you. It would be impossible!"

Assured of this fact she goes on more comfortably. "I treated you very unkindly, George." He would begin an animated denial, but she waves her hand, and continues: "But really, you know, you were dreadfully solemn!"

"Yes," he admits with a sigh; "I was a fool to expect you to care for such a sober fellow as I am."

"I—I think I am a little more sober now," she says, in the sweetest little whisper.

He assents to this, but is far too simple and straightforward to perceive what is opened to him by these gentle insinuations.

"Was there *ever* anything so stupid as a man?" she asks herself. She taps her foot impatiently on the gravel, and he feasts his eyes, unchecked, on her lovely face.

"It was leap-year *last* year," she remarks, at last, with some emphasis and much meaning.

"Yes," says simple George, "I believe it was."

She is silent, and he is too happy for speech. Then, "How much do you like me now?" she says, with much innocence; "as much as that?" holding her hands about a yard-and-a-half apart.

"How much do you like me?" guardedly.

"Just as much as you do me!"

"That's impossible," the unconscious lover says, in a tone of deep conviction.

"I don't know," retorts Miss Phyllis, meditatively, resting her chin in her hand.

"Suddenly she turns her blushing face to him, "*Why* did you come home?" she asks. "Was it——"

Even he can read what her loving eyes say.

"Phyllis!" he exclaims, enraptured.

"Yes," she says, softly; "what?"

"My dearest!" he cries, no longer blind. "Phyllis, may I kiss you?"

"But surely," says naughty Phyllis, quaintly, "we are cousins. Why not?"

He clasps her in his arms. "Can you guess why I came home," he whispers.

The mischievous maiden whispers back, triumphantly: "I knew before you did!"

CONSTANCE A. M. COTTERELL.

A REQUIEM.

FORWARD! Alas, we cannot yet
Look forward thro' the winter night;
A friend is passing out of sight:
Can we, about his bier, forget?

We shared so many joys of his:
The growing marvel of spring leaves,
The brooding swallows in the eaves,
The white soul of the chrysalis;

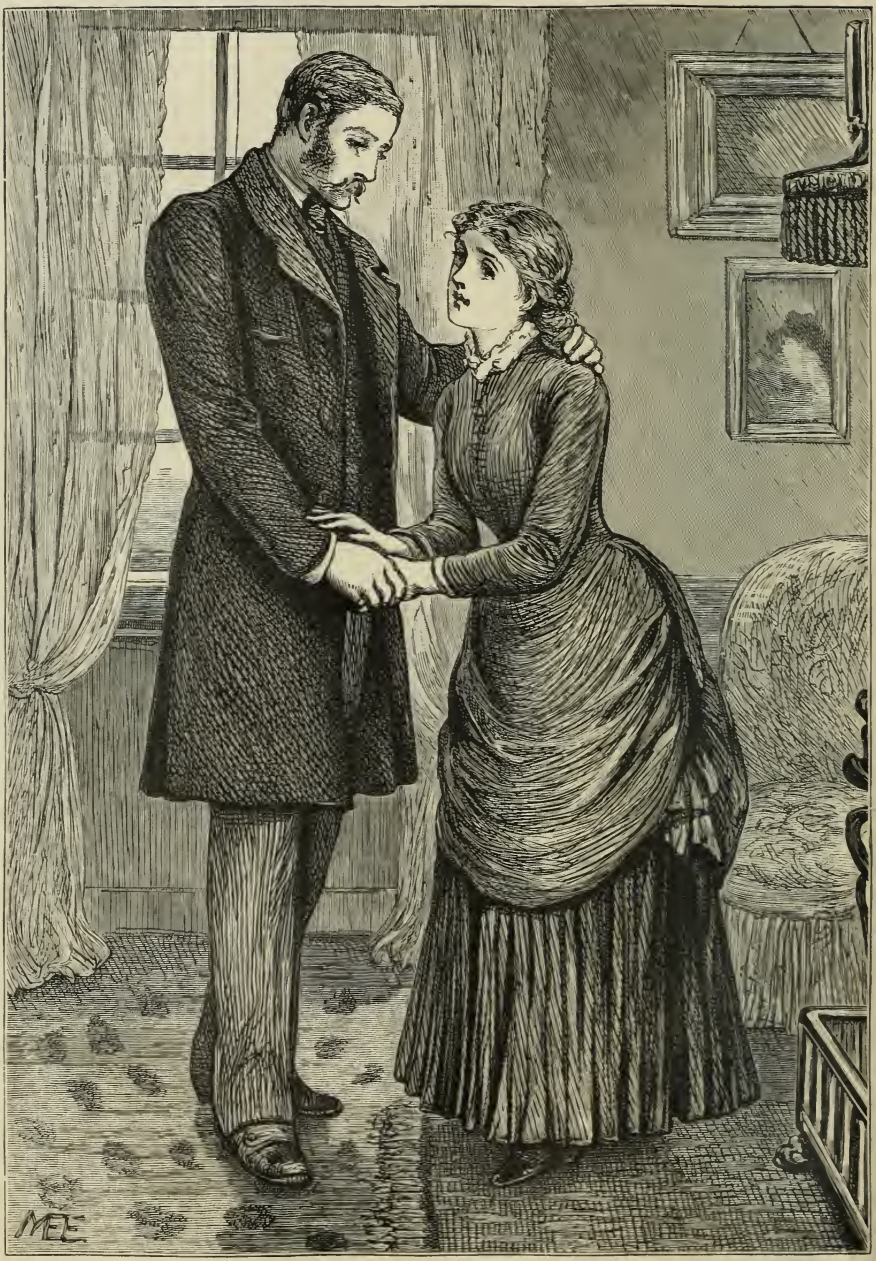
The blush upon the apple-tree,
The heavy-headed fields of June,
The bridging pathway of the moon,
In August nights, across the sea.

Some gusts of swiftly-driving rain,
Some tears there may have been as well:
But looking back, we only tell
That sunshine on the land has lain.

In vain we long to hold him here,
In vain we clasp him close and tight;
The bells break harshly thro' the night,
And our old friend becomes "last year!"

Forward! There may be much in store,
Ere long a Dawn of Hope be ours,
A child of Promise crowned with flowers—
But our Last Year comes back no more!

G. B. STUART.



M. ELLEN STAPLES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"AND DO YOU REALLY MEAN TO SAY THAT THEY DO NOT AT HOME YET KNOW WHERE YOU ARE?" HE ASKED GRAVELY.

THE ARGOSY.

FEBRUARY, 1885.

THE MYSTERY OF ALLAN GRALE.

CHAPTER V.

MISGIVINGS.

"IT is abominably trying!"

It would be hard to find a pleasanter place than the "morning room" at Dering Court where these words were uttered. And it was at the breakfast table, the morning after his nephew George's return, that General Vivian spoke that discontented speech, so out of keeping with the snug room, its bright surrounding of flower garden and its music of happy birds.

"It is abominably trying!"

"But is it not our duty to meet trials with resignation?" asked his wife.

The trial was that George had announced he had an appointment with a friend in London, and must go off there that very morning. A certain picture gallery, which he named, was to be opened on that day, and those who wished to choose anything from its contents, must, he said, take time by the forelock. He mentioned the two facts without any direct connection. That, of course, was easily inferred.

"In my day," said the General, "young men found out their work in life and buckled to it. They were not always gadding about; here, there, and everywhere. I doubt if many of our greatest commanders ever even saw the Continent except when they went there with their conquering armies. Before I was George's age, I had fought ——"

"O, but the work of destruction is always at one's hand, while works of construction are slow," rejoined Mrs. Vivian, again. She never directly censured her nephews; rather, she brought forward arguments which might be advanced in their favour and put them before the General, on whom they had much the same effect that a red rag has on a bull.

"Works of construction!" he scoffed. "Works of fiddle-de-dee! I know we are not all meant to do the same work. I'd have liked a nephew of mine in the army,—but I'm sure I was not arbitrary when the boys did not incline that way. But when it seems the same with navy, and Church, and bar, it is abominably trying! And, then, this constant running about cannot be defended for a moment. Here's the architect coming this morning with his plans for the new cottages on the Green; that's a thing that ought to interest George's taste. But he's to go off to look at some daubs of castles and waterfalls that some man in a London attic has made up out of his own head!"

"My dear uncle," said George, "I could not even know that the architect was coming to-day. As you scarcely expected me home, you could not have made the appointment with any view to me."

"Of course not," returned the General; "that's the hardship of it. I never do know anything of your comings and goings. I am left in the dark to do the best I can. Rolling stones, sir, gather no moss. People who are not often at their posts, are rarely there when they are wanted!"

"I am very sorry it has happened so," said George, amiably, but without any sign of re-considering his determination. "I could not imagine I should be wanted; and I knew you had Edgar."

"Edgar!" echoed the irate General. "Edgar was never good for anything but his books and his boating, and now apparently he isn't good even for them, for he comes home without a single honour, and was on the losing side at the Putney race."

"Somebody must be on the losing side," Maria ventured to say.

Her uncle turned upon her. "I suppose so," he snapped. "I don't know it as a matter of experience—*I* never was. Other people are not so tried in their young folks," he went on. "There's Grale, now. Allan takes his holiday like the rest of you, but I'll engage he's in the counting-house this morning, and will be there to-morrow and the day afterwards. Grale said to me a little while back that if he went out of business at any moment, his boy was quite fit to take it up. I should not like to put either of you in possession of my estate at present; I can tell you that."

"Edgar," said Maria, "do you remember those poor people, the Masseys, on the Green, in whom you took so much interest last winter, when the son was so badly hurt on the railway?"

"Certainly I do," answered Edgar, looking at his sister with some surprise; for Maria had spoken suddenly, and in a high unnatural tone of voice, and with a vivid flush on her cheeks.

"Well," she went on, in the same high key, "widow Massey came up here yesterday, with a case of conscience."

The General had been startled into silence. He was now quietly grumbling at the particular condition of his egg.

"And what might that case of conscience be?" asked George, thankful for the diversion so unexpectedly created.

"It concerned the letting of her rooms," Maria answered, her manner gradually growing more natural. "A stranger—a woman—had come to her, asking about them, and saying that she might return and desire to enter into their occupancy at any moment."

"Well?" said George, "I suppose Mrs. Massey is glad enough of a tenant."

"Very glad," assented Maria. "But she has her doubts of this stranger. Chiefly, so far as I can make out, because the woman wears a bright yellow cloak."

Edgar looked up with a kind of start. George laughed heartily.

"Also because the applicant did not give any name, and Mrs. Massey forgot to ask it," continued Maria. "She asked my advice about taking her in; I told her I saw no reason why she should not take her."

"Really, Maria," said Mrs. Vivian, sarcastically, "you may feel quite proud of these important consultations."

"At any rate, she is the only one of our young folk whom anybody would think of asking about anything," grumbled the General, with whom his gentle niece was a great favourite.

"I must have seen that woman at the railway station last evening," remarked Edgar. "A woman, apparently waiting for the train to come in, was there in a long yellow cloak."

"What was she like?" inquired Maria.

"Not very young," answered Edgar. "Nearly forty, I should think. Dark and thin; not bad looking. Yet it's odd; it struck me at the time that she was not particularly anxious to be seen or noticed; rather that she was stealthily watching for somebody. She vanished into the waiting-room when the train came in sight, and peeped out at it from the window. It made me think of the female detectives one reads about in police reports."

Maria looked up suddenly.

"Maria," said Mrs. Vivian, in her smooth incisive tones, "how long shall I hold my cup before you notice that I am doing so?"

"I beg your pardon, aunt," said Maria, whose face had grown ashy pale.

"Maria is in a terribly nervous state," thought George: she ought to go away somewhere for a change. "Maria," he asked, aloud, "what is scaring you?"

"The yellow cloak," smiled Maria, whose colour was returning to her, together with her presence of mind.

"What nonsense you are all talking!" cried the old General, testily. "A yellow cloak is as good as a green one."

"That depends upon who it is that wears it," quietly remarked Mrs. Vivian.

George rose from table when breakfast was over, to say adieu before proceeding on his expedition to town.

"I may be back to-night," he said, with an air of unconcern. "If not, I will write. I shall stay, as usual, at the Iron Cross Hotel."

George's departure broke up the party. The General rose too. Maria saw that he assisted himself from his chair with his hand on the table. It was a little thing to strike her. But she remembered it afterwards.

Perhaps he noticed it himself, for he said, with a dim smile: "I suppose there is a day when one first begins to grow old, though it may come on so gradually that we do not know when that is. Well, well, a good soldier obeys the retreat as promptly as the advance."

He went out. Maria's eyes were full of tears. They met Edgar's.

"Don't you think he is very much changed?" she asked.

"He has been so angry with me since I came down from college, bringing disappointment with me, that I have scarcely had courage to look at him," answered Edgar.

"I have seen the change for a long time," returned Maria, sadly. "He has had a great many money worries lately. Several matters have turned out ill. I think he fancies that he may be near going, and that neither of you will be ready to come after him. If you and George gave him a little pleasure in yourselves you might be doing more than you think, and renewing his lease of life. Our right-doing or wrong-doing always does more good or evil than we can guess, Edgar."

"I am sure I have done no evil," said Edgar, stung by her words and by her serious, regretful tone. "I have made one or two mistakes. I meant no harm, but I let it prey upon me too much, and it spoiled my working powers."

"You admit you made very undesirable friends at college."

"But I did not know they were undesirable. It seems mean to defend myself now, and throw stones at them, by saying that nobody who did not see the whole thing can understand how I was deceived. I don't believe there is anything in this world which knocks one down so much as being disappointed in people we have thought worthy."

"I know there is nothing so terrible," said Maria, in a low tone.

"When we first find ourselves face to face with meannesses and treacheries which we have often read about but never thought to meet, it seems to kill the very heart within us."

Maria drew in her breath. "I know it does," she whispered again.

"Of course, it is but for a time," Edgar went on, more cheerfully. "We are only stunned, and get back to the right proportion of things by-and-by. If one swallow does not make a summer, neither does one cloud make an eclipse."

"The General is sometimes deceived himself," said Maria. "Neither you nor George treat him quite as you ought to. You give him no confidence."

A secret was weighing upon Edgar, humiliating in itself, but most painful to his frank nature because its existence threatened to build up a separation between himself and those whom he most loved and

honoured. If his uncle had only stormed and grumbled—if he had not also pined and fretted and looked worn and old—if Maria had not spoken of troubles that had already come upon him, then Edgar would have been frank with him. It was not for himself that he feared the outpourings of the General's vials of wrath. Nay, he could trust that in their dregs would be found forgiveness and restoration. And if he could not bring himself to tell the whole truth to his uncle, then he said to himself that he must not tell Maria or George. George was off again, and one could not tell when he might return! Edgar wanted help, and had no one to give it him.

And there could not be one day's delay. He was standing on a mine which might spring at any moment. Every additional hour of silence would but add to his condemnation, if revelation came at last.

Suddenly it occurred to Edgar that he would go down and see Allan Grale. He did not care for Allan much—but he was surely a good-hearted, easy-going fellow, one who would not make a mountain out of a mole-hill, and perhaps might give him aid and advice. And on the spur of the moment, he went out.

He was nearing his destination, when he heard hasty footsteps behind him; and a frank-looking, handsome young man of three or four-and-twenty, ran past him with a hurried salutation. It was Charles Carr; and Edgar thought he looked grave.

This young fellow was an orphan and very distantly related to Dr. Palmer, who was his guardian and the trustee to his small property, and with whom he lived. Charles had high-flown notions about making a name for himself in the world; but for the present, "while his greatness was a ripening," as the Doctor phrased it, he had a post in the Grale Works.

"You are in a hurry!" remarked Edgar.

"Yes," called back the young man. "Allan Grale sent me to the house to get some letters he is waiting for."

After Edgar Vivian quitted the breakfast-room, the General returned to it. The poor old gentleman had been fidgeting about in an unhappy frame of mind.

"Maria," he said anxiously, "I think Edgar has been talking to you. Has he told you anything?"

Maria looked up from her work in surprise.

"Told me anything!" she echoed. "What is there to tell? We were only talking over his failure at college and your disappointment. He bitterly regrets some mistaken friendships which he made during his early days there."

The General shook his head. "There is something definite to be told," he said. "Something remains behind; I am sure of it. It is that which cuts me to the quick. What have I done that I should forfeit my boy's confidence? It is the same with George. I have felt it with him for a long time, and now, at this home-coming, it seems worse than ever."

The General's remark about Edgar had half alarmed Maria. But this additional suggestion concerning George only reassured her. "O uncle," she said, "you are letting yourself grow fanciful!"

"I wish I was," he answered. "I wish I was, though it would be another sign of growing old and breaking up. I think I must really go and take a rest before that architect comes. It's strange to be weary in the morning—crying 'halt' at the first step of 'quick march.'"

CHAPTER VI.

SEARCHING THE DESKS.

EDGAR VIVIAN knew that his uncle was right when he said that Allan Grale was sure to be in his father's counting house this morning. But neither Edgar Vivian nor anyone else could have guessed what had been going on in that counting house.

It might not have surprised anybody very much had they seen Mr. Grale come down at day-break and let himself into the locked-up works. But his son Allan was with him, and that was surprising. For Allan's habits were not early; especially where business was concerned. Even his father was astonished at the alacrity with which Allan had kept the appointment: one that had been made between them the previous night, after a long conversation. Mr. Grale thought Allan must be turning over a new leaf, but he did not say so. He never expressed satisfaction with anybody but himself.

During their conversation the previous evening, Mr. Grale had confided to Allan the disagreeable fact—that somebody within his counting-house was dishonest. He had known it for a long time. Again and again had he missed sums, often considerable, from safe places, to which nobody but himself could have access without the unlawful possession of a master key. Measure after measure which he had taken to prevent this had been partially defeated, though the thief seemed to have grown somewhat timid and dilatory in his operations; and of late they had ceased. But as no change had occurred in the employés of the works, the criminal must still be there. And Mr. Grale had just learned that during the past few weeks his bankers and their agents in one or two neighbouring towns had cashed sundry open cheques with his signature attached to them—but which he had never signed.

Grale, the father, was a portly man, with white hair, rather handsome features, and a face that would have been pleasant but for its curious mingling of domineering and discontent.

"Do you suspect anybody?" Allan had asked him the previous night, after listening to the story.

"How can I?" returned Mr. Grale. "The workmen are well known and have been with me long. They'd hardly begin to steal my money and forge my name now."

"The clerks are all respectable, father," observed Allan.

"Yes," assented Mr. Grale. "There's old Wilton,—he has no temptations, his habits are those of a good old woman, and he is saving money. Then there's Mawson, I don't believe ill of him—he's too great a fool to be a rogue. And there's Smith: he can only write in his own peculiar way with his left hand. And there's Charles Carr."

"Ah,—how is *he* getting on?" quickly returned Allan. For Charles Carr, Dr. Palmer's ward, had not been in the Grale counting-house very long, and his being there at all was something of an experiment. After a triumphant school career, he had gone through his course at Cambridge, being helped to it by Dr. Palmer. Then a severe illness, attended by certain grave symptoms, had rendered it desirable that all stringent mental work should be laid aside for a time, and partly for the sake of providing him with employment, as well as to eke out his very slender means, Dr. Palmer had made interest for him with Mr. Grale. That gentleman had found him a desk, with the grumbling comment, that probably his ideas would be above his work. Hence Allan's question.

"Carr is doing well enough," replied Mr. Grale. "But you seem scarcely to see the importance of the matter in hand, Allan. Let me tell you that one or two of these forged cheques run into three figures."

"Three figures!" exclaimed the young man.

"Yes. Altogether the sum is very large."

"What is to be done, sir?"

"Well, I intend to pay an early visit to the counting-house to-morrow, and overhaul the desks," said Mr. Grale. "You shall go with me. I had meant to do it by myself but I am glad you are come. Two heads are better than one."

Allan did not make any reply. A curious expression passed over his face. His father saw it, and misunderstood it.

"I hope you are not turning squeamish," he said. "The desks are my own property, kept solely for use in my service. The clerks ought to understand that I have a full right to a master key."

"I doubt if they do so understand," said Allan.

"Well, that does not matter to me. And if there's nothing concealed, nothing can be found. I'm not likely to read love-letters,—even if old Wilton has any," he said with a sudden smile. "Though, to be sure, love-letters might give a clue to—to very much!"

Allan sat in silence. But he did not refuse to accompany his father on his search, and the elder gentleman, rapping at his son's door next morning, was astonished and gratified to find that Allan was already up and dressed, in readiness to accompany him.

Mr. Grale's Mill was not very far from his habitation, though to all seeming, it might have been in another world. For the Grales' house was an old house, standing in a hollow, among trees. Mrs Grale

always declared it was damp, and Mary Anne always added that all country houses were so. Certainly that objection would not have applied to the factory, which stood high and dry on the moor, locally known as the Wilds. "Grale's Mills" had at least destroyed little natural beauty, possibly the wide landscape received a more kindly human interest, from the row of workpeople's cottages,—the said workpeople's recent outcoming from the agricultural class being amply vindicated by the neat kitchens seen through the open doors, the profusion of flowers in the windows, and the care and skill shown in the cultivation of the little gardens. Mr. Grale had had a rare chance of proving that some, at least, of the patriarchal virtues and blessings might survive under manufacturing conditions. But Mr. Grale's chief object in life had been to make money. He had urged the rights of capital, till he had awakened a responsive grumble about the claims of labour. Dering had already been thrown into agitation by one or two "strikes" among his people, who under his influence—be it remembered—were fast learning to think more of their wages than of their work, and were fevered with a restless desire to "get on" and have more money to spend.

The little cottages all lay silent behind their window blinds as Mr. Grale and Allan went down on their expedition. Mr. Grale let himself into the counting-house, and set to his disagreeable task with methodical calmness. There did not seem anything for Allan to do, except to look on, struggle with a refractory lock or lift a book or paper.

Mr. Wilton's desk was the first looked over, and that did not take long. Mr. Wilton was an old bachelor who had seen better days, and was a man of education and gentility of the old-fashioned sort. Mr. Grale was not a man to have no suspicion of anybody, but he had little of Mr. Wilton. The desk of the left-handed clerk, Mr. Smith, was almost empty, containing nothing but the regulation envelopes and writing paper, except a half emptied packet of sweets. That of James Mawson, on the contrary, was stuffed full of all sorts of rubbish, crumpled comic papers, torn song books, and spoiled office paper, over which Mr. Grale made a wry face. All these three clerks were elderly and plodding men.

There remained only Charles Carr's desk—Charles Carr, with his youth and his possible prospects, so pathetically different from his colleagues! Perhaps Allan thought his father would spare that,—for Charles was a friend and a "gentleman," and visited the Grales. But the stern man of business had no such compunctious thought.

Charles's desk was beautifully neat. There lay envelopes, and paper, and pens, and memoranda, all properly assorted. There was, however, one roll of paper, not office paper, fastened by an elastic band. It lay in front of a little drawer fitted into the back of the desk. Mr. Grale lifted it out that he might open this drawer. It pulled out lightly, having nothing in it except a quill, some wafers and an

envelope. Mr. Grale took up this envelope, and as he looked at it, his face suddenly changed.

Allan bent forward. For half a minute he thought the envelope was one which had been through the post. It was directed to "Charles Carr, Esq.," and seemed to have a queen's head and the other postal marks upon it. For the same half moment he thought the superscription was in his father's handwriting.

But while he peered forward, his father looked up at him significantly, and turned the envelope. It had never been used! Mr. Grale turned up the other side again and then Allan saw what his father had seen already, that it was only an ingenious imitation, the "Queen's head" done in red ink, and the postal marks in black chalk.

"So ho!" cried the elder man, "these are my young gentleman's recreations, are they? There could not be a better training for forgery, see you, Allan. Now I think we will take a look at this roll, and one does not know what else we shall find."

But as he hastily snapped off the elastic band, the tramp of the early-coming workmen was heard in the yard. He got time, however, for one glance upon the paper, and it seemed quite enough for him, for as his eyes glanced at it he gave a suppressed cry.

The voice of Mr. Smith, the clerk, was heard just outside the counting-house door. It was no part of Mr. Grale's plan to be caught at his investigations. He hastily rolled up the paper, thrust back the envelope, shut to the desk, and locked it.

"You may go in and out as you like, Allan," he said; "but I shall not leave this counting-house until I see this matter through. I'll search the desks again, as if for the first time, when all the clerks are here; and there's enough in that last one to make that miserable young fellow criminate himself, and avow everything. The young villain! And to leave the proofs here! Such scamps as he are always reckless."

"Not always: some of the guiltiest escape scot-free," said Allan.

"Why, Allan, man," said the old gentleman, unheeding his son's observation, "in that paper there is actually written down ——"

But there was no more time. Mr. Smith entered the counting-house, and the father and son walked apart. The clerk gave them his morning greeting; he had seen his master there as early before, but it was another thing to see Mr. Allan. "Turning over a new leaf," thought that worthy man.

Mr. Wilton was the second clerk to arrive at the works, then Charles Carr, and lastly James Mawson, who was rather late. Charles came in, as usual, cheerful and chatty. He was a great favourite with the elder men, whom he, being a gentleman born and bred, treated with a respect they never received from the Radically-disposed workmen. Charles Carr was a slight, delicate-looking young man. He had soft blue eyes, and hair of that beautiful golden hue which is rarely seen after childhood is passed.

Mr. Grale did not tell his clerks what was amiss. He said simply that something was wrong, and that he intended it should be sifted to the bottom. "The innocent could have no interest but in the exposure of the guilty," he added.

None of them spoke at first in answer. Charles Carr looked amazed. Mr. Wilton was the only one who made a faint protest. He recognised Mr. Grale's just right, he said; yet really, when for forty years one had kept a character which ——

"Tut, tut," Mr. Grale exclaimed. "I have no right to suspect anyone, but if I begin to pick and choose whom I might possibly suspect, somebody might then have a right to complain. Let me have your keys."

Mr. Smith meekly brought his key to Mr. Grale. Mr. Mawson rattled his down rather noisily on the desk. Charles inserted his, turned it, and opened back the lid.

"Don't touch anything inside," said Mr. Grale, quickly. And Charles instantly sat down on his high stool. His delicate face was a little flushed.

The examination of the desks could scarcely offend anybody, it was so cursory,—far more cursory than it might have been had they not been examined already. When Mr. Grale approached Charles, the young man rose quietly, and stood beside him.

The master made a feint of turning over the envelopes and note paper. As he did so, Charles stretched forth his hand and possessed himself of that innocent looking roll of paper. At the same time, he opened the little drawer, and disclosed to view the mysterious envelope. But he did not offer to touch that.

Mr. Grale pounced upon it. Charles did not wince in the least. "I have often amused myself by doing such things," he said, quietly.

"A dangerous amusement!" cried Mr. Grale, his face growing purple with excitement. "And now, young man, what is that roll you are holding in your hand?"

"Only some private matter of my own, sir," said Charles, his face crimson; "something in my own writing."

"Show it to me," commanded Mr. Grale.

But Charles held it firmly, though he was trembling.

"Sir," he said, "I assure you solemnly that it is a mere trifle. It concerns nobody in the world but myself."

"Boy," said Mr. Grale, passionately, "whoever committed the crime that I am tracing home, is not likely to stop at solemn assurances, however false! I have evidence against you of which you do not dream ——"

"Sir," interrupted Charles with quiet dignity, though the colour was coming and going fast in his sensitive face. "You have not yet told me what it is I am accused of."

"You are not yet accused of anything," replied Mr. Grale, rather more civilly. "I only ask you at once to make a clean breast of what

you know, or have done. I expect that whatever you have done you have not done it alone; probably you are but a tool in some much craftier hand. You must say whatever you have to say before you leave this room."

"I have nothing to say, Mr. Grale," said Charles Carr again, with the same gentle firmness. "I scorn to say I am innocent, when I am absolutely ignorant of the whole matter. I do not know what is amiss, and I do not understand what you mean by saying you have evidence against me of which I do not even dream. Whatever it may be, it is false in itself, and is falsely misleading you."

The young man's manner had gathered fire as he spoke and the last words rang out fearlessly.

"You are convicting yourself," said Mr. Grale with a pitying laugh. "Well, I have given you a chance, Carr. Had you made a clean breast of it, I might have had consideration for the feelings of yourself and the friends who are interested in you. Do you refuse to show me that paper?"

"Yes, sir," said Charles, with a swift blush.

"Will you show it to Dr. Palmer?"

"If Dr. Palmer still asked it, after I had told him it was a private matter, that concerned myself alone."

"Very well," said Mr. Grale. "You may yet take an hour or two to consider whether you will not show me that paper yourself. It will be better for you."

Charles had a great mind to dash out of the place and refuse ever to re-enter it. But sundry considerations restrained him. Mr. Grale had been kind in taking him into his office and conceding certain privileges to him: and if he was unjust and harsh now, he was acting under the irritation of loss and wrong. Charles felt no fear of the result. "Am I to go on with my work?" he asked.

"Certainly," replied Mr. Grale.

Allan had been home to breakfast, and was back again. He had been in time to see Charles's desk opened and to hear the colloquy. He stood at a distance, watching, but saying nothing, a pained expression visible on his brow. It seemed to say that he would willingly have stopped the proceedings if he had had the power; and the clerks, one and all, liked him for it.

Presently, after Mr. Grale had retired to his own private room, Allan went up to Charles Carr.

"Carr," said he, speaking with kindly consideration, "I left my letters on the breakfast table at home just now, will you kindly go for them."

Charles went, as desired, and came back in no time with the letters: which he handed to Allan. Close upon that, word was brought up that Mr. Edgar Vivian was waiting.

Allan hastened to him. As they shook hands, Edgar asked if he could spare him five minutes for private conversation.

"Yes, and welcome," replied Allan, "if you'll come out in the open air. This place is stifling."

Edgar assented. He thought Allan looked pale and ill even through the sunbrowning of his recent travels. That last holiday had surely not done very much good either to him or to his own brother!

"I have come over to ask your advice and perhaps your help, Grale," he began, as they strolled along together.

"And I was just wishing to see you, to ask you to do me a favour," returned Allan. "I don't know what put you into my head,—and yet I might have thought of you before."

"I'm sure I shall be only too happy, if it be within my power," was the reply.

"Oh it's certainly that," returned Allan, "it's a mere trifle.".

"I wish I could say the same of mine," observed Edgar ruefully.

"Well, what is it? It may not seem so large to me as to you."

"The truth is," narrated Edgar, speaking with hurried shamefacedness, "I am deep in debt."

"Well," said Allan, coolly, "that is always unfortunate,—but it does not surprise me."

Edgar felt rather taken aback. "It would surprise me very much if I were in debt on my own account," he replied. "Last year I was induced by one I then called a friend to accept a bill for two hundred pounds. If matters had been as they were represented to me, I should certainly have been repaid before now, and able to meet the bill. As they really are, I shall never receive a penny."

"Can't you come down upon your quondam friend?" asked Allan.

Edgar Vivian was secretly chafing under the calm sarcastic tone of the other. He felt that Allan ridiculed him as a dupe.

"I don't know where he is," he said, shortly.

"But don't you know where his friends are? They might meet you, at least half way, for his sake, you know. Family affection will often do as much as that, when family pride is endangered by some imminent exposure."

Edgar hated Allan's cynicism; yet he thought it only made him the more valuable adviser for the world and the world's ways.

"I would not think of asking relatives to save me from the consequences of a deception into which I had been led without any consent or connivance of theirs," he cried, hotly. "That is not my style of morality. It may be highly respectable, but for my own part, I would rather be a highwayman than an extortioner!"

"Oh dear, dear," said Allan, in a mocking but withal kindly tone.

"I can't go into the details of the story," said Edgar. "All I can say is, the family are poor and unfortunate, and this man whom I called my friend, turns out to be the black sheep of the flock. Oh how cruelly and cleverly he deceived them! And any attempt to bring punishment on him would injure his people far more than it

would hurt him. No. I must find some way myself, and bear the trouble my own folly has brought upon my head."

"The beggar calculated upon your good-nature, I see," mused Allan. "I suppose you are paying an exorbitant interest?"

"I received one hundred and forty pounds, and I have to repay two hundred," said Edgar.

"And you haven't told your uncle?"

"No,—he has been vexed a great deal lately and has had losses of his own. Besides I have no right to ask him to make good a venture of mine, about which I did not consult him. I must fight my own battle somehow. And I thought you might advise me."

"What is the present pinch?" Allan inquired.

"I have paid off sixty pounds already. One hundred and forty—the sum which I actually received—remains. It is all due the day after to-morrow; but if I can pay down fifty pounds at once, they will wait and take a hundred in three months' time. I shall have my yearly allowance by then, and shall be able to meet that payment, if I could borrow a fifty now from somebody who could wait a little for its repayment."

Edgar's face flushed as he spoke. His was one of those proud and sensitive natures which are keenly alive to the degradation involved in every sort of financing and loaning. He could not help wondering whether Allan might not be able to do him this service, but he would never go nearer asking it, than by this simple statement of his need.

Allan was thoughtful.

"I think I could do this for you," he said, presently, in his good nature. "I feel sure I can do it, though I can't say so quite definitely in the moment. I'll let you have a note to-night, and you may look out for an enclosure!"

"I don't know how I shall ever be able to thank you!" said Edgar, with a gasp, for the revulsion of feeling was almost too much for him. "I'll write at once and tell the harpies that I have a reasonable expectation of fulfilling their demands. And oh—you said you were about to ask me something? I'm ashamed to mention it after this, for it is sure to be so trifling in comparison!"

"Well, it is trifling, in a way," said Allan, in his leisurely fashion, "and yet it is something I would only ask of one whom I trust and who trusts me. I want you to take charge of a little box for me, for a few days."

"Oh, certainly, I will do that," answered Edgar, surprised at the smallness of the request.

"There has been something rather unpleasant going forward at our place while I have been away,—I scarcely know what it is yet, for I've not fathomed it," explained Allan. "My father opened the matter to me last night. He is being robbed, it seems, and it has gone on to forgery. Everything is being searched, or will be; literally everything. He talks of calling in the police, and I expect he will.

And one has some matters—you understand—that one does not want overhauled, either by the police or by one's own father. Things that it would be profanity for their eyes to see—you know, Edgar? Why, there are some letters of your sister Maria's—we did not return each other's letters—why should we?—there was little enough love in those *I* got at any rate! But I can't destroy them. So if you——"

Allan stopped short, and held out his hand to Edgar, who wrung it heartily.

"You are a good fellow," said young Vivian. "The box will be quite safe with me. When shall I expect it? How shall I get it?"

"As soon as possible," Allan answered. "I'll find some opportunity for sending it up through the day, or this evening at latest. It is quite a light box. But I don't care that it should be seen by anyone save our two selves. And you won't speak about it to your folks, will you, or to *anyone?*"

"You may rely upon me," promised Edgar. "And I'm so sorry you have got a bother directly you come home from your holiday. There seems nothing but trouble everywhere, nowadays."

"I believe you, Edgar."

"Are your father's suspicions directed to any particular quarter?"

"To a very ridiculous one, if he had the sense to see it; but when he is in this angry mood he can see nothing but his own will. His suspicions at present point to Charles Carr."

"What! to Charles Carr!" exclaimed Edgar. "Oh, that's nonsense, Grale! I'd answer for him as I would for ourselves. Don't let your father waste time in that quarter."

"He believes he has evidence," returned Allan, standing still opposite Edgar, and looking dreamily across the moor. "I don't know what it may be; but I don't doubt Carr's innocence. I scarcely think my father, prejudiced though he may be, will act without clear proofs, so Charlie need not be afraid."

"Well, good-bye now," said Edgar. "Perhaps you'll come up to see me yourself this evening, and by that time you may be able to bring me news that you have discovered the right man."

CHAPTER VII.

WATCHING THE AVENUE.

Edgar Vivian hastened back to the Court with a much lighter heart than he had carried from it. He was not cheered only by the thought of his own relief. He felt that he had gained some brief admittance to the inner life of one who had hitherto shown him only an outside, seemingly hard and cynical.

Edgar had not known much of the love affair between Allan and his sister Maria. It had never been openly declared, but it had been openly frowned down by Mrs. Vivian: in spite of the great wealth

of the Grales, she did not like the idea of any link being formed between the manufacturing people and herself. The General would also have objected, but for a long time he entirely refused to believe his wife's hints. His eyes were opened at last by Maria's persistent refusal to accept or even entertain a most eligible proposal. After sundry very angry cogitations with himself, he had been touched by his niece's sweet, patient face, and had overruled the subtle machinery by which his wife was contriving to banish young Grale from his former freedom at Dering Court. For a while Allan had been restored to his former position, and for a while poor Maria had enjoyed those coy pleasures of courtship which lie outside the limits of defined engagement. Mrs. Vivian remained steadily cool and antagonistic, but her nephews were genial and kindly ; and when in some of their summer rambles or rides, Allan and Maria fell a little behind together, George and Edgar only smiled indulgently, and went on in front.

Edgar had been away from home when this pleasant state of affairs strangely came to an end, when Maria suddenly secluded herself from Allan, who in his turn seemed to seek her no more. Maria's pale face and silenced spirits told that she was suffering, and perhaps an added shade of recklessness in Allan Grale only revealed the same thing in a masculine form. Whatever might be the cause of the "lovers' quarrel," as George Vivian, regarded it, he had noticed that at the few brief encounters which had since taken place between his sister and Allan, there was a look in her eyes and a flutter in her manner which convinced him that her heart was not dead to the claims of her old love. And Allan's few words that morning had thrilled a romantic chord in Edgar Vivian's breast, and he felt that in spite of all his cynicism, young Grale was a warm-hearted, good fellow at bottom.

"What have you been doing this morning?" asked Mrs. Vivian of Edgar, at luncheon.

"I have been down to the works to see Allan Grale," he answered. "I wanted to ask him his opinion about a little business matter."

"A right adviser on all such matters," observed Mrs. Vivian, deliberately, "for whatever else they may not be, the Grales are thorough business people."

Edgar saw Maria wince, and came to the rescue. "Yes," he said, "I envied Allan the praise my uncle gave him this morning. By the way, where is uncle? Is he not coming to lunch?"

"No," said Maria; "he told me we were not to wait for him. I think he was going to drive Mr. Bird—that is the new architect, you know—down to the Stone farm. The people there have been asking for some improvements for a long time. The Stone Farm is so far on Mr. Bird's way back to town, and I think they will very likely lunch together at the Knight's Arms."

The people at the Knight's Arms were old servants of the Court,

who had married and transformed themselves into a host and hostess. "Uncle says it is like old times to see Webster waiting on him at table," Maria added, with a pale smile.

"And what have you been doing with yourself all the morning?" Edgar asked in return.

"Oh, all sorts of things; this has been a busy day," she answered.

"Well," said Mrs. Vivian, "I have been, candidly speaking, idle. Women of our class always are idle, you know, only some of them choose to disguise the fact with busy idleness."

Edgar thought his aunt had grown more acid than she used to be. Surely it was not always so bad as this! When long absence from familiar things reveal their true proportions, it is always hard to realise that it is not they, but only our eyes which are changed.

"And what do you mean to do this afternoon, Maria?" Edgar asked. "Let us go for a walk together! A walk untrammelled by any card-case. It is ages since we have had one of our old-fashioned rambles."

"We might call on the Palmers, perhaps," said Maria. "I never feel a visit there to be a call of ceremony." Maria had her own gentle fancies about her brother Edgar and Agnes Palmer.

"You ought to pay your call there very early if you pay it at all," said Mrs. Vivian. "Remember they don't have open-house afternoon tea, but a real family tea-time. Such a delightful meal! I only wish people of position could indulge in these primitive customs."

They started together in the afternoon. Maria made a pretty picture as she stepped out under the waving shadows of the great trees. She wore a simply-made white dress of some thick, soft material, with a scarf of black lace thrown lightly round her shoulders, and a smaller one wound about her large straw hat. The only bit of colour about her was a spray of variegated geranium, fastened at her neck. As she took her brother's arm, she looked up into his face and smiled softly, as if feeling happy.

They took the way to the left through the wood which lay between Dering Court and Dering village. Through the wood, one came out upon Dering village—the old village, not Mill-Lane, the name of the row of cottages built by Mr. Grale for his mill-hands. Church, parsonage and school, shop and farm, were dotted along the winding road; amid liberal reaches of common land and rich woodland. About the last house in Dering, standing quite in a hollow, almost buried among trees, was Moorland House, Mr. Grale's place, and from that point, the road went, growing bleaker and barer, till it passed Mill-Lane, and reached the Works. Here the high road broke away into the open country, but a bye road, that which Edgar had travelled that morning, led back to Dering Court. Dering might be described as a straggling village, encircling a beautifully wooded hill. The hill itself was named in county records as the Camp, and was not without archæological interest.

"I think we will take my aunt's hint, and go straight to Dr. Palmer's," said Maria. Secretly she thought that perhaps the sisters might come out and join them in their ramble. Lettice Palmer was a great fern hunter and might be easily induced to avail herself of Edgar's climbing and scrambling capabilities.

"Do you know, Maria?" said Edgar, confidentially, for he saw through Maria's kindly little plan, and was sorry to disappoint it, and perhaps sorry to be disappointed of it—"do you know, Maria, I don't think we'll call on the Palmers at all to-day."

"Oh, why not?" asked Maria, surprised.

"Can't you endure me by myself?" he said, playfully.

"I want you to go there—and I thought you would like it," she answered. Her lip trembled. She formed few plans now, and had no hopes inside her own life, and the failure of her harmless little stratagem hurt her.

"I should like to do anything you wish, and it is always a pleasure to me to see any of the Palmers," said Edgar; "but I have reasons for not caring to go there this afternoon. I think there is some little bother up; not exactly affecting them, but Charlie Carr."

"Charlie Carr!" she echoed. "What has happened to him?"

"Well, not much—as I conclude it will turn out," answered Edgar. "Something has gone wrong in the counting-house at the Works, and Mr. Grale has taken into his head that young Carr is at the bottom of it."

"I do not understand you, Edgar."

"Well, the fact is, Mr. Grale has been robbed of late pretty extensively; indeed robbery is not the worst; and he fancies he has reason for suspecting Charles Carr."

Maria had remained standing still during the interchange of the last few remarks. Was it only the green shadow of the trees which made her face seem white?

"Who told you this?" she asked, sharply.

"Allan Grale himself," replied Edgar.

"He does not believe it?" she added.

"Of course he does not."

"When did the Palmers hear of it?" she inquired, walking on.

"I do not know whether they have heard of it," he answered. "In the uncertainty, I would just as soon not call on them this afternoon."

"If they have heard it, I should like to be the very first to tell them I do not believe it," said Maria, energetically.

"Just so. But we must make sure before speaking. I dare say the matter will be cleared up speedily; perhaps already is so; in that case your speaking would be uncalled for. Allan mentioned it to me in confidence."

"We will not call," Maria decided. "But I don't care any more for a walk, Edgar. I feel quite tired out already."

"Maria," said Edgar, kindly drawing her hand through his arm,

"you are too sensitive. If you are thus affected by a little blow falling on the lives of friends, how will you bear your own share of blows? They come to each of us."

"I know they do," said Maria, almost passionately.

"I do not say we ought not to feel for others' pain as much as for our own," continued Edgar; "only while our own pain may make us weak, the pain of sympathy should rather make us strong—strong to help."

"Ah Edgar," interrupted Maria, "you speak nothing but truth, and yet you may not know what you are talking about."

"I fear you are becoming nervous and morbid," he went on. "I can see your life is a trying one, Maria. It lacks incident."

Maria's lips moved, but she said nothing aloud. They had turned homewards.

"Edgar," said Maria, suddenly, "I should very much like to get a chance of speaking with Allan Grale."

"He may be at the Court this afternoon," replied Edgar. "At any rate, he has promised to send up something to me, and I fancy it is not at all unlikely he may bring it himself."

"Then," pursued Maria, eagerly, "you must contrive to let me see him alone."

"That will be easy enough," said Edgar, lightly. "But rely upon it, Maria, Charlie Carr will find his own way out of the mess without your troubling yourself to laud him to Allan."

It was only four o'clock when they reached home; but Maria was surprised to find the General had not returned. Mrs. Vivian was not visible. Edgar went to the library to write letters. A maid brought Maria a cup of tea to the morning-room.

Maria was feeling strangely nervous, partly at the news she had heard, partly lest she should miss Allan Grale if he came. She wished to see him and to have speech with him very particularly indeed.

Restless and uneasy, she presently went up to dress for the evening, determined not to be out of the way if he did come. He might come perchance before going home to dinner.

From the depths of her wardrobe Maria hastily drew a dress that she had not worn for some time; a dress of black silk and tulle. Soft white ruffles were already sewn in its open bosom and short wide sleeves, and these had evidently been worn before, for though not soiled, they were limp and flaccid with hanging by. For sole ornament she added a small cross of pearls, which she took from the very bottom of her jewel case. Then she looked at herself in the mirror, with a strange impersonal interest, as one might gaze at a picture. The geraniums taken from her morning dress lay on her toilet-tray. As her eye passed on to them, she said to herself,

"I remember I wore ivy leaves on that evening!"

And, so saying, she swept aside the white muslin window curtain, and putting her hand through the open casement, drew in a delicate spray of ivy and twined it at her breast, so that the white cross lay

upon it. Somehow it was strangely suggestive of a memorial-stone with a background of churchyard-evergreen.

Then she drew up a chair beside the window and sat there, invisible behind the curtain. She made no pretence of book or work now. She was candidly watching—watching the avenue.

The avenue was a winding one, and the lodge lay partly out of sight from the house. Still a fair stretch of the road was in view. Maria sat on, watching.

Suddenly the gate clanged heavily, and she half started up in a fever of impatience. Was he coming at last?

No. Not Allan this time. No!

But who was it? What could it be? It looked like a procession.

There came first a chaise, driven very slowly. It was followed by a riding-horse led by a man; other men followed.

A great cry rose to Maria's lips, but she caught it back and rushed down stairs.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. FORESTER.

On that pleasant morning, when the sunshine had been so sweetly and softly radiant in the wide breakfast-room at Dering Court, it had seemed only hot and glaring in the close narrow streets which lie between the fashionable West End of London and the unfashionable river-side. Very hot and glaring and parched and dusty did those Chelsea streets look to a certain pair of eyes which gazed forlornly upon them—eyes accustomed to the soft verdure of a village green, and the rich shadows of an ancient forest. Unutterably dingy were some of those streets, but that which these country eyes beheld was by no means one of the worst. Though the houses were at once mean and pretentious, Great Gray Street itself was tolerably wide, and was actually ended by a view of some trees in a little square with still higher claims to gentility. It had only one shop—at the corner; and its monotony was broken upon by a huge Board School and a little iron church. If Rose Raynham, the spoiled pet of sweet Redbourne, knew more of London, she would have decided that she had reason to be fairly satisfied with her present surroundings.

Perhaps there were times since she left her home when she had wished herself back in Redbourne. But she would not own this even to herself, unless she did so by a passionate reiteration of her determination not to go back—never to go back until her uncle would have to own what a mistake he had made in his estimate of Mr. Forester and the love he had for her; and then she was sure her uncle would be sorry, and she would be delighted to forgive him, and to forget all the harsh things he had said.

Miss Raynham was a tall, slight girl, with an abundance of soft

waving fair hair. She had a sweet peach-bloom complexion, and large violet eyes. She wore a gray alpaca dress, fresh, somewhat cheap and flimsy; but at least it was unpretentious. A stranger looking at Rose would have said, "What a pretty girl! And how ladylike!"

She stood impatiently at the window for some minutes, and then, as impatiently turned away. In the loneliness of these present days, she had begun to talk aloud to herself.

"Surely he must come to-day!" she murmured. "But the old saying runs that grass won't grow while you look at it."

So she sat herself down at the table, and tried to read a penny paper which she had sent for the evening before. But now she found its sentimental romance rather stale. Was not her own life growing into a romance equal to any told in fable? Alas! Alas! A neighbouring clock struck out midday.

Omens and "sayings" often seem strangely fulfilled, because they are only heeded when such fulfilment may be reasonably expected. Rose had not sat so for ten minutes before the poor little shell of a house rang with a knock on its outer door unlike any of the knocks she had yet heard there. Superstitious Rose sat still, breathless, as if a movement might change the fact whether or not her expected visitor had arrived.

Then she heard the servant's shrill voice answering questions which Rose could not hear. Then there came steps on the stairs, and her door was flung open, and the servant announced:

"A gentleman to see you, miss."

"You foolish little lassie!" said the visitor, as he advanced towards her. "What have you been doing?" He held out both his hands and took both of hers.

He was a tall, distinguished looking young man, and the half reproving question was spoken in a wholly caressing tone.

"Oh, Mr. Forester," cried Rose, with one convulsive sob. "I have been so unhappy." And there was a cadence in her voice as if the unhappiness was all over now. A shadow, which perhaps had been dissipated by his first sudden sight of the pretty young thing, was settling down on Mr. Forester's aristocratic face.

"And do you mean to say that they do not at home yet know where you are?" he asked, gravely, when they had talked a little.

"No," she replied. "You do not know what I have been made to suffer. You cannot guess the cruel things which were said to me and about me after you left. They even talked against you!" she added, looking at him, as if she felt this was the height of injustice.

"You must not be too unforgiving over that," said Mr. Forester, quietly. "They had no chance of knowing me as you did, you see."

"Of course not," answered Rose, drawing herself up proudly. "But when I said so, would they believe me?"

"Oh, you defended me, did you! Well, Rose, you should have left me to fight my own battles."

"I believe they watched me when I went out to keep my trysts with you in the forest." Poor Rose had caught up certain romantic phrases in the course of her sentimental reading.

"Who watched you?"

"Oh, I cannot tell," said Rose. "People. Old Nanny, our servant, for one."

Mr. Forester looked thoughtful. He remembered many a picturesque walk in the forest, he and Rose sauntering together hand in hand. There was no harm whatever in it, neither had he intended harm, but it might not look very pretty in any story that did not end with a wedding. He had been playing at shepherd life then, and Rose had made a charming shepherdess! He did not think she looked half so well in her present dress as she had in the white garden hat and neat cambrics in which he had first seen her, and which had provoked no very distasteful comparisons.

"The people were mean," said he.

"Mean!" echoed Rose, astonished at his mildness; "there is no word bad enough for it. And then they used to shake their heads and say, to my uncle: 'Oh, Mr. Raynham, take care! she's young and motherless.' They did indeed."

"Well, what next?" asked Mr. Forester. Rose could see he was pained, but in her eagerness for self-vindication she did not pause.

"Uncle Raynham spoke to me kindly enough at first," she went on. "He said then he only blamed himself; that he ought to have remembered I must feel lonely in that big house, with only him and old Nanny and the rough country servants, and the village people to speak with; after being accustomed to sit with poor mamma in her parlour at home and associate with genteel acquaintances."

Mr. Forester remained silent. Rose continued.

"My uncle said to me: 'I've often wished you were a little different, Rose; had you been a bustling, notable girl, as some are, you might have looked forward to take over the inn when I'm gone, and there would have been a good home for you, child, married or single—something safer and more solid than your pretty strips of fancy work and your little bits of pictures.' Yes, he said it."

"There is a great deal of sound sense in that wish," observed Mr. Forester, very gravely. "I am sure your uncle is a good man, and fond of you."

Rose looked up at him as if a little puzzled. "I know uncle is fond of me," she said, quite confidently. "But somehow we are different. You see, poor mamma and her people were quite different from my uncle's side of the family."

Rose's maternal grandfather had himself been an artist of virtuous and industrious habits, though of humble pretensions. He had lived very modestly in the country town not far from Redbourne, and there his only daughter had married James Raynham, who was clerk in the bank, and the younger brother of the landlord of the Redbourne

hostelry. Rose could not remember the old artist, her grandfather, who had died in her infancy. She scarcely remembered her own father. But her mother had only died two years ago, and had therefore lived long enough to inoculate her daughter with her own petty ideas of gentility, and her own undefined scorn for the honest simple-minded brother-in-law, whose help had eked out her small annuity, and who was the only earthly guardian to whom she could leave her orphan girl; and Rose had been removed to the Ash Tree Inn at her death. Mrs. Raynham had thus brought Rose up in a foolish way, inculcating grand notions. She had set the experiences of her own past life before Rose in very brilliant lights, detailing homely incidents with a pomp and circumstance fit for a paragraph in the county paper. Of late—since her acquaintance with Mr. Forester—Rose had dwelt much on these reminiscences, and had reflected that she did not really belong to worthy Joseph Raynham and his old-fashioned, farm-house-like inn, but to a very different and much higher order of things.

"But then uncle went on to speak about you," returned Rose, the colour rising in her face. "He said—oh, Mr. Forester, I can scarcely tell you what he said!" she broke off in confusion.

"Try to tell me, please," said Mr. Forester, steadily. "Remember they are not your own words; you are only repeating his."

"Well," she responded, making an effort, "what he said came to this: he reminded me that I was a poor girl, who had my own way to make in the world, and that I must not fancy—oh how can I say it? He said you were a gentleman, who would only marry a lady."

"And then?" asked Mr. Forester, in a very low voice.

"And then," she answered, "I got angry; but how could I help it? And I said if you were an artist and a gentleman, so was my own grandpapa. And I said that you were as noble and true as the sun is bright, and then ——" (The room was rather glaring, and at that moment Mr. Forester instinctively shaded his face with his hand). But the flood of bitter memory overcame the girl and she began to weep.

Anybody might have pitied her. Certainly Mr. Forester did. If only he had been in the green glades of Redbourne, he would certainly have given some tender sign of sympathy. But this cramped room, with its raw green papering, its magenta carpet, its faded wool-work, and its grim portraits of forgotten divines, was enough to dry up any sympathy, or at least to repress all manifestations thereof. If Mr. Forester pitied Rose, it is probable that he pitied himself still more.

"And so I came away," said Rose, looking up; "they would not believe what I said, and I could not live with those who mistrusted me and maligned you. I told my uncle that I should leave."

Mr. Forester kept silence a moment longer. There are hours when the "Lord of Burleigh" ballad, with its noble lover and its lowly maiden, commends itself to youthful enthusiasm; and there are other hours—sometimes baser ones—when more conventional counsels prevail.

"And what did your uncle say to that?" he asked, gently.

Rose was again crying bitterly. Her heroics had exhausted themselves. The answer came in the pitiful accents of an injured child. "I don't think he believed me! And then," she went on presently, "he said he must get things altered somehow. So he sent for my cousin Cicely."

"Who is that?" interrupted Mr. Forester.

"She is my cousin," replied Rose; "she was his eldest sister's daughter. She came over once for a day while you were at Redbourne, but I don't know whether she saw you. I know she gave me a warning lecture about you."

"Very much obliged to the cousin Cicely," remarked Mr. Forester, drily. Perhaps he wished there had been somebody to give a warning lecture to him.

"Uncle Raynham sent later for Cicely to come and stay; I know he did. It did not much matter then, for you were gone. Cicely had her orders; she was never to let me out of her sight, so that I could neither write to you nor receive a letter from you. I suppose they would have intercepted yours had you written. I was like a prisoner. And if I continued obstinately saying you were brave and true, not false and fickle, Cicely was to take me away to her own home for a change. They would never have changed me."

Rose was innocently magnifying her own constancy. Mr. Forester writhed inwardly. And yet what a pretty child she was and how guileless. Oh the pity of it! He ought to have foreseen this from the beginning.

He rose and stood beside her, gently touching her bright hair.

"And yet you used to pretend you did not care for me," he said.

She looked up at him with a great flood of tenderness in her eyes.

"Ah, but in these bitter days I have learned to know my own heart," she whispered. "I know now that I can never care for anybody but you. You can never have a rival:—no, though he were a prince on his throne, and you were a prisoner in a dungeon!"

"I hope it won't be quite so bad as that," said Mr. Forester, smiling dimly, as he paced to and fro in the narrow room. He did feel something like a prisoner already.

"And so I came away," she said, looking dreamily towards the window.

"Do you mean you ran away?"

"Yes. How else could I have come? I left the old place at dawn."

It was as well that she did not go into all the details of her flight—the little hoard of money taken from her desk—the dark, covering cloak in which she had passed through the Redbourne fields, the various devices by which she had contrived that her appearance should vary at different stages of her journey. Some people admire adventure and stratagem very much—at a telescopic distance. And Mr. Forester was one of these.

"You posted your first letter to me from Sprogston," he observed, "the one in which you said you had left home and scarcely knew where you were going."

"Yes, I walked all the way there, through bye-lanes," said Rose. "I felt frightened, lest I should be discovered and sent back."

"That would have been better for you."

Rose glanced at him, and shook her head sadly. She was saying within herself, "I will never go back." But what she said aloud was: "From Sprogston, I went to Southampton, and from Southampton I came here. I don't think they will trace me easily."

"What made you come here?—to these lodgings, I mean?" asked Mr. Forester. "Do you know the people?"

"I had heard of Mrs. Wilson, the landlady," Rose answered: "a young married couple, who lived awhile with my uncle, had stayed here before, and I heard them speak of her. They said she was kind, and careful. Her husband was a bookseller. She is quite superior."

"And as soon as you got to these lodgings you wrote to me again?"

"Yes—but it seemed as if I was never to hear from you," she replied, the pain of her lonely terrors returning upon her. "And when your letter did come, you did not follow so soon as it promised."

"I came as quickly as I could," he answered, gravely. "You see I was at a great distance. And now the question is, Rose, what are you going to do?"

She looked at him with bewildered, incredulous eyes. He had never known a moment of such exquisite misery. He had believed himself sincere when he had wandered with this girl through the greenwood shades, and had vowed to her that he could ask nothing more from life than her love, and long quiet days of peaceful happiness in some rural cot. But he felt doubly sincere now as he wished that he had never gone to Redbourne, never seen Rose Raynham, and that she was back again, in her uncle's parlour, busy with her patterns and her paintings, and with appropriate village wedding bells in prospective.

"What—am—I—going—to do?" Rose repeated, slowly. It was not the words so much as the way in which they were spoken which hurt her. The colour faded from her face, and her voice did not sound like hers. "Are you angry with me for coming away?"

Was she going to faint? What could he do? Poor, innocent little girl, surely she had been wounded very sorely.

"How can I be angry?" he asked. "I see how you must have suffered. I am sorry for the cause of your coming—sorry that I have somehow offended your friends and made them quarrel with you—most of all, sorry for the annoyance you are enduring, and which I shall not be able altogether to avert, do what I may."

She sat forward in her chair. A strange hardness seemed settling on her young face. It was strange that the moment she seemed to draw away from him, he felt once more inclined to draw her back.

"Rose," he said, "you would never quite own to loving me—until to-day."

"You might have guessed," she whispered.

"If you had done so, I should have told you then exactly how matters stand—as I shall tell you now," he went on. "As I have no doubt your uncle, Mr. Raynham, feels, all true love must end in marriage."

"Yes," she faltered.

"And I should have told you that I could not marry you for a long, long time. It did not seem then as if that could have mattered much. We might have been happy enough; you living safely in your pretty little home, and I coming down to Redbourne to see you and to paint my pictures. Such a courting time as that could hardly be too long—it would have been like Eden," he said, with a smile.

"And that's how it might have been," cried Rose, roused by the idyllic picture.

"Yes," said Mr. Forester. "But now it is—as it is. If I were to marry you, at once, Rose, I should ruin my own prospects, and so have nothing to offer you. You used to laugh at my pictures, while I was vain of them, but I should not like to rely on them for an income all my life."

"But I'm not used to being rich," said Rose—"and some artists do make plenty of money. Even my grandpapa made enough."

"Some artists—but not I," returned Mr. Forester, ignoring the family reference. "No, Rose, my future really depends on the good will of a certain relative, who is not pleased with me already."

The girl looked up eagerly.

"Time might pave the way for speaking of you to this relative; for introducing you to him. Let me see; you were sketching in the forest the first time we met."

"Yes," said Rose.

"Ay. And—and we must wait, Rose; there's nothing else for it. You, my dear, might go home again. Your uncle will have been so frightened by your absence that he is sure to be kind to you. You can truly say you went off because of his harshness and afterwards repented of it."

Rose stood up. Her face was still pale, and there was a cold flashing light in her eyes. The girl was not by nature passionate, but recent excitement had strung her to a high pitch of heat, and the heat was a white heat. She spoke low and slowly, in tones which carried chill conviction of her determination to him who heard them.

"I will not go home," she said; "things cannot have grown better, but worse, through my leaving it. My uncle reminded me that his roof was my shelter only while I obeyed him. I have taken my own way—I will abide by it."

"But what is to be done?" urged Mr. Forester. "There are practical considerations, you know ——"

"Yes, I know," she interrupted, rather hastily. "I can work. I have not been an idle girl hitherto. I know I am a stranger here. But when one carries one's crewel work and one's sketches in one's hand to the shops, if the work is wanted, they do not much care who the worker is."

Mr. Forester shook his head dreamily. Indeed he felt as one in a dream of drifting, unable to direct his own course, but sure that it will be stopped somewhere, whether by dashing over the rapids or by settling into a harbour! He heard Rose's words, but he had enough experience to know that Rose could find no safe maintenance by the exercise of her slender arts. He felt stifled. Surely the close room was growing closer!

"Rose," he said, "I must leave you now. I will come again to-morrow, and by then, I shall have thought over all you have told me, and shall have got information on one or two points for our guidance. Do not worry yourself. Do not be afraid." (He said inwardly, that if one of them was to be sacrificed, it must be himself, but relief would come somehow—and it would not be.) "You are to be cheerful, Rose. Promise me!"

That tone brought back her smiles in a moment, and, with the smiles, the old charm which had first won the light heart of Mr. Forester. As he ran down stairs after shaking hands, he looked almost like a happy man!

But the landlady was awaiting him in the passage—a tall, spare, elderly woman, with a black lace cap shading an old fashioned and rather faded face: a very dragon of propriety.

"Sir," said she, and her accent was good, though her tone was acid, "I must crave your pardon for enquiring whether you are any relative to the young lady upstairs? She looked so ladylike and spoke so pleasantly, saying she was an artist from the country, that for her sake, I broke my rule, which is never to receive a lodger without references. My having done so in this case must be my excuse for putting this plain question. I owe it to my other lodgers, as well as to myself."

What could Mr. Forester do? One word—and Rose would lose even this shadow of home and protection. Her true tale would not be believed; he knew well what would be thought of it. The landlady stood before him, pale, proper and portentous, and there was the girl upstairs. It seemed to him a symbol of the world hunting down a lamb that had strayed from its safe daisy meadows.

"Madam," he said, nervously, "I recognise your right to ask questions. I am thankful that the young lady—so utterly a stranger—was fortunate in finding a lodging so well guarded as hers will be in your house. I am not a relative—but a friend"—he felt the landlady's eyes fixed upon him, and his face glowed. "A friend—who hopes shortly to be something more. At the present moment a day or two will decide a great deal for us—and if some circumstances

prove favourable—and the young lady will consent, I hope we may be married—from this house."

He scarcely knew what he said. He only knew that the stern landlady's face relented, and that was enough. The good woman herself thought how natural his hesitation and confusion were, and was half angry with herself for having caused them.

"You must forgive me for asking, sir!" she said. "But she looked so young and so pretty, and coming here all alone ——"

"She is an orphan, with no friends near," murmured Mr. Forester, half because he felt he ought to say something, and half because he wanted to enlist a little kindly sympathy.

"Poor child!" said Mrs. Wilson; "but I'll take great care of her, and when it is as you hope, sir, she won't feel an orphan or friendless any more. Good morning, sir."

Wonderful wells of sentiment and kindliness may lie beneath black lace caps and faded faces. Mrs. Wilson kept her word in being kind to Rose. If a list of good deeds and friendly services rendered, though "not in the bond," could be made out, large would be the item set down to the credit of care-worn landladies and toiling lodging-house servants!

George Vivian (for the disguise of "Mr. Forester" has doubtless been but a transparent one to the reader) went from the Chelsea lodging to lunch at Verrey's, in Regent Street; and thence to a picture gallery, where he lingered aimlessly for a long time. He did not return to his hotel till the gloaming was far advanced, when he found that a telegram had arrived for him.

The telegram threw George into a state of excitement. He wrote a hasty note to Miss Raynham, left his portmanteau at the hotel, and hurried to the railway station.

Just as he had got into his carriage, he saw, on another platform, from that he had just quitted, a slight, dark woman, enveloped in a long yellow dust cloak, who seemed to be striving to hide herself from the public gaze, while she stealthily peeped and peered about her. George wondered whether it could be the woman of whom he had heard accidental mention that morning, at the breakfast table, and if so, what or whom she could be looking after; or if yellow cloaks were a new fashion and would soon be common.

(To be continued.)

CARAMEL COTTAGE.

DISAPPEARED.

OCTOBER was setting in beautifully. Some people say it is the most lovely month in the year when the skies are blue and genial.

Seated at the breakfast-table at Caramel Cottage that Tuesday morning, with the window thrown open to the warm and pleasant air, the small party of three might have enjoyed that air, but for being preoccupied with their own reflections. Edgar Reste was thinking of the bank notes which the postman had just brought him in Captain Amphlett's letter; Katrine Barbary sat shrinking from the vague fear imparted to her by the curious avowal her father had made in language not too choice, as his covetous eyes rested on the money: "For that, a man might be tempted to smother his grandmother." While Mr. Barbary had started instantly up and flung the window higher, as if in the silence that followed the words, they had struck back upon himself unpleasantly, and he sought to divert attention from them.

"A grand day for the outlying crops," he remarked, his lithe, slender form, his pale, perfect features, showing out well in the light of the brilliant morning. "But most of the grain is in, I think. We shall have a charming walk to Church Leet, Edgar."

"Yes," assented Mr. Reste, as he folded the notes together and placed them in his pocket-book. There were six of them for £10 each.

Breakfast over, Katrine set off for Dyke Manor that morning as usual, to talk to Lena in French, and teach her to read it. She stayed luncheon with us. Chancing to say that her father and his guest were gone to Church Leet, Mrs. Todhetley kept her.

At four o'clock, when Katrine went home, she found they had returned, and were then shut up in the gun-room. Katrine could hear the hum of their voices, with now and again a burst of merry laughter from Edgar Reste.

"Have they had dinner?" she enquired of Joan.

"Ay, sure they have, Miss Katrine. They got back at two o'clock, and I cooked the steak at once."

I had lent Katrine that afternoon the "Vicar of Wakefield,"—which she said she had never read; one could hardly believe such a thing of an English girl, but I suppose it was through her having lived over in France. Taking it into the back garden, she sat down on a rustic bench, one or two of which stood about. By-and-by Edgar Reste came out and sat down beside her.

"Had you a nice walk to-day?" she asked.

"Very," he answered. "What a quaint little village Church Leet is! Hardly to be called a village, though. Leet Hall is a fine old place."

"Yes, I have heard so. I have not seen it."

"Not seen it! Do you mean to say, Katrine, that you have never been to Church Leet?"

"Not yet. Nobody has ever invited me to go, and I cannot walk all that way by myself, you know."

He was sitting sideways, his left arm leaning on the elbow of the bench, his kindly, luminous brown eyes fixed on her fair pretty face, all blushes and dimples. Ah, if fortune had but smiled upon him!—if he might but have whispered to this young girl, who had become so dear to him, of the love that filled his whole heart!

"Suppose you walk over with me one of these fine days before I leave?" he continued. "It won't be too far for you, will it?"

"Oh no. I should like to go."

"There is the prettiest churchyard you ever saw, to rest in. And such a quaint little church, covered with ivy. The Rectory, standing by, is quite a grand mansion in comparison with the church."

"And the church has a history, I believe."

"Ay, as connected with the people of the Hall and the Rectory; and with its own chimes, that never played, I hear, but disaster followed. We will go then, Katrine, some afternoon between now and Saturday."

Her face fell; she turned it from him. "*Must* you leave on Saturday, Edgar?"

"My dear little cousin, yes. Cousins in name, you know we are, though not in reality."

"You did say you might stay until Monday."

"Ay, my will would be good to stay till Monday, and many a Monday after it: but you see, Katrine, I have neglected my work too long, and I cannot break into another week. So you must please make the most of me until Saturday," he added playfully, "when I shall take the evening train."

"You English do not care to travel on a Sunday, I notice."

"We English! Allow me to remind Mademoiselle that she is just as much English as are the rest of us."

Katrine smiled.

"My good mother instilled all kinds of old-world notions into me, Katrine. Amidst them was that of never doing week-day work on a Sunday unless compelled by necessity."

"Do you never work on a Sunday—at your reviews, and writings, and that?"

"Never. I am sure it would not bring me luck if I did. Suppose we fix Thursday for walking to Church Leet?"

"That will do nicely. Unless—Squire Todhetley invited you to go with him to Evesham one day, you know," broke off Katrine. "He may just fix upon Thursday."

"In that case we will take our walk on Friday."

A silence ensued. Their hearts were very full, and that makes

speech reticent. Katrine glanced now and again at the pages of the "Vicar of Wakefield," which lay in her lap, but she did not read it. As to the barrister, he was looking at her; at the face that had become so dear to him. They might never meet again, nothing on earth might come of the present intimacy and the sweet burning longings, but he knew that he should remember her to the end of time. A verse of one of Moore's melodies passed through his mind; unconsciously he began to hum it:

"O, that hallowed form is ne'er forgot
Which first love traced;
Still it, lingering, haunts the greenest spot
On memory's waste."

"Here comes Joan to say tea is ready," interrupted Katrine.

They strolled indoors slowly, side by side. The tea-tray waited in the parlour. Mr. Barbary came in from the gun-room, and they all sat down to the table.

After tea he went back to the gun-room, Mr. Reste with him, leaving Katrine alone. She had the candles lighted and began to mend a piece of Mrs. Todhetley's valuable old lace. Presently Joan came in to ask a question.

"Miss Katrine, is it the brace of partridges or the pheasants that are to be cooked for supper? Do you know?"

"No, that I don't," said Katrine. "But I can ask."

Putting down her work, she went to the gun-room and gently opened the door. Upon which, she heard these remarkable words from Mr. Reste:

"I wouldn't hesitate at all if it were not for the moon."

"The moon makes it all the safer," contended Mr. Barbary. "Foes can't rush upon one unawares when the moon's bright. I tell you this will be one of the best possible nights for you."

"Papa, papa," hurriedly broke in Katrine, speaking through the dusk of twilight," is Joan to cook the pheasants or the partridges?"

"The pheasants," he answered sharply. "Shut the door."

So the pheasants were dressed for supper, and very nice they proved with their bread-sauce and rich gravy. Mr. Barbary especially seemed to enjoy them; his daughter did not.

Poor Katrine's senses were painfully alert that night, as she lay listening, after getting to bed. The words she had overheard in the gun-room seemed to her to bear but one meaning—that not only was her father going abroad into the wilds of danger, but Edgar Reste also. They had gone to their respective rooms early, soon after she went to hers; but that might be meant as a blind and told nothing.

By-and-by, she caught a sound as of the stairs creaking. Mr. Reste and her father were both creeping down them. Katrine flew to her window and peeped behind the blind.

They went out together by the back door. The bright moonbeams lay full upon the yard. Mr. Reste seemed to be attired, like

her father, in high leggings and a large old shooting-coat, no doubt borrowed plumes. Each of them carried a gun, and they stole cautiously out at the little side gate.

"Oh," moaned the unhappy Katrine, "if papa would but take better care of himself! If he would but leave off doing this most dreadful and dangerous thing!"

Whether Katrine fell asleep after that, or not, she could never decide: it appeared as though but a short time had elapsed, when she was startled by a sharp sound outside, close to the house. It might have been the report of a gun, but she was not sure. This was followed by some stir in the yard and covert talking.

"They are bringing in the game they have shot," thought Katrine, "but oh, I am thankful they have got back in safety!" And she put the pillow over her head and ears, and lay shivering.

Squire Todhetley was as good and lenient a man at heart as could be found in our two counties, Warwickshire and Worcestershire; fonder of forgiving sins and sinners than of bringing them to book, and you have not read of him all these years without learning it. But there was one offence that stirred his anger up to bubbling point, especially when committed against himself. And that was poaching.

So that, when we got downstairs to breakfast at Dyke Manor on the following morning, Wednesday, and were greeted with the news that some poachers had been out on our land in the night, and had shot at the keepers, it was no wonder the Squire went into a state of commotion, and that the rest of us partook of it.

"Johnny, tell Mack to fetch Jones; to bring him here instantly," fumed he. "Those Standishes have been in this work!"

I went to carry the orders to Mack in the yard. In passing back, after giving them, I saw that the dog-kennel was empty and the chain lying loose.

"Where's Don?" I asked. "Who has taken him out?"

"Guess he have strayed out of hisself, Master Johnny," was Mack's answer. "He was gone when I come on this morning, sir, and the gate were standing wide open."

"Gone then?—and the gate open? Where's Giles?"

"But, even as I put the question, I caught sight of Giles at the stable pump, plunging his head and face into a pail of water. So I knew what had been the matter with *him*. Giles was a first-rate groom and a good servant, and it was very seldom indeed that he took more than was good for him, but it did happen at intervals.

Old Jones arrived in obedience to the summons, and stood on his fat gouty legs in the hall while the Squire talked to him. The faith he put in that old constable was surprising, whose skill and discernment were about suited to the year One.

His tale of the night's doings, as confirmed by other tales, was not

very clear. At least, much satisfaction could not be got out of it. Some poachers congregated on a plot of land called Dyke's Neck—why it should have been so named nobody understood—were surprised by the keepers early in the night. A few stray shots were interchanged no damage being done on either side, and the poachers made off, escaping not only scot-free but unrecognised. This last fact bore the keenest sting of all, and the Squire paced the hall in a fury.

"You must unearth them," he said to Jones: "don't tell me. They can't have buried themselves, the villains!"

"No need to look far for 'em, Squire," protested Jones. "It's them jail-birds, the three Standishes. If it's not, I'll eat my head."

"Then why have you not taken up the three Standishes?" retorted the Squire. "Of course it is the Standishes."

"Well, your honour, because I can't get at 'em," said Jones helplessly. "Jim, he is off somewhere; and Dick, he swears through thick and thin that he was never out of his bed last night; and t'other, Tom, ain't apperiently at home at all just now. I looked in at their kitchen on my way here, and that was all I could get out of Mary."

It was at this juncture that Katrine arrived, preparatory to her morning's work with Lena. Old Jones and the Squire, still in the hall, were chanting a duet upon the poachers' iniquity, and she halted by me to listen. I was sitting on the elbow of the carved-oak settle. Katrine looked pale as a sheet.

Girls, thought I, do not like to hear of these things. For I knew nothing then of her fears that the offenders had been her father and Mr. Reste.

"If the poachers had been taken, sir—what then?" she said tremblingly to the Squire, in a temporary lull of the voices.

"What then, Miss Barbary? Why then they would have been lodged in goal, and the neighbourhood well rid of them," was the impulsive answer.

"Snug and safe, miss," put in old Jones, shuffling on his gouty legs in his thick white stockings, "a-waiting to stand their trial next spring assizes at Worcester. Which it would be transportation for 'em, I hope—a using o' their guns indeed!"

"Were they known at all?" gasped Katrine. "And might not the gamekeepers have shot *them?* Perhaps have killed them?"

"Killed 'em or wounded 'em, like enough," assented Jones, "and it would be a good riddance of such varmint, as his worship says, miss. And a misfortin it is that they be *not* known. Which is an odd thing to my mind, sir, considering the lightness o' the night: and I'd like to find out whether them there keepers did their duty, or didn't do it."

"I can't see the dog anywhere, father," interrupted Tod, dashing in at this moment in a white heat, for he had been racing about in search of Don.

"What, is the dog off!" exclaimed old Jones.

"Yes, he is," said Tod. "And if those poachers have stolen him, I'll try and get them hanged."

Leaving us to our commotion, Katrine Barbary passed on to the nursery with Lena, where the lessons were taken. This straying away of Don made one of the small calamities of the day. Giles, put to the torture of confession, admitted that he remembered unchaining Don the past night as usual, but could not remember whether or not he locked the gate. Of course the probability was that he left it wide open, Mack having found it so in the morning. So that Mr. Don, finding himself at liberty, might have gone out promenading as early in the night as he pleased. Giles was ready to hang himself with vexation. The dog was a valuable animal; a prize for any tramp or poacher, for he could be sold at a high price.

We turned out on our different quests; old Jones after the poachers, I and Tod after Don: and the morning wore on.

Katrine went home at midday. This news of the night encounter between the keepers and the poachers had thrown her into a state of anxious pain—though of course the reader fully understands that I am, so far, writing of what I knew nothing about till later. That her father and Edgar Reste had been the poachers of the past night she could not doubt, and a dread of the discovery which might ensue lay upon her with a sick fear. The Standishes might have been included in the party; more than likely they were; Ben Gibbon also. Mr. Jim Standish had contrived to let Katrine believe that they were all birds of a feather, tarred with the same brush. But how could Edgar Reste have allowed himself to be drawn into it even for one night? She could not understand that.

Entering Caramel Cottage by its side gate, Katrine found Joan seated in the kitchen, slicing kidney beans for dinner. Her father was in his favourite den, the gun-room, Mr. Reste was out. When she left in the morning, neither of them had quitted his respective chamber, an entirely unusual thing.

"How late you are with those beans, Joan!" listlessly observed Katrine.

"The master sent me to the 'Silver Bear' for a bottle of the best brandy, and it hindered me," explained Joan. "They were having a fine noise together when I got back," she added, dropping her voice.

"Who were?" quickly cried Katrine.

"The master and Mr. Reste. Talking sharply at one another, they were, like two savages. I could hear 'em through my deafness. Ben Gibbon was here when I went out, but he'd gone when I came in with the brandy."

What with one thing and another, Katrine felt more uncomfortable than an oyster out of its shell. Mr. Reste came in at dinner-time, and she saw nothing amiss then, except that he and her father were both unusually silent.

Afterwards they went out together, and Katrine hoped that the unpleasantness between them was at an end.

She was standing at the front gate late in the afternoon, looking up and down the solitary road, which was no better than a wide field path, when Tod and I shot out of the dark grove by Caramel's Farm, and made up to her.

"You look hot and tired," she said to us.

"So would you, Miss Barbary, if you had been scouring the fields in search of Don, as we have," answered Tod, who was in a desperate mood.

At that moment Mr. Barbary came swinging round the corner of the short lane that led to the high road, his guest following him. They nodded to us and went in at the gate.

"You do not happen to have seen anything of our Newfoundland dog to-day, I suppose, Mr. Barbary?" questioned Tod.

"No, I have not," he answered. "My daughter mentioned to me that he had strayed away."

"Strayed away or been stolen," corrected Tod. "The dog was a favourite, and it has put my father out more than you'd believe. He thinks the Standishes may have got him: especially if it is they who were out in the night."

"Shouldn't wonder but they have," said Mr. Barbary.

Standing by in silence, I had been wondering what had come to Mr. Reste. He leaned against the porch, listening to this, arms folded, brow lowering, face dark, not a bit like his own pleasant self.

"I am about the neighbourhood a good deal; I'll not fail to keep a look-out," said Mr. Barbary, as we were turning away. "He was a fine dog, and might prove a temptation to the Standishes; but I should be inclined to think it is more likely that he has strayed to a distance than that they have captured him. They might find a difficulty in concealing a large, powerful dog such as he is."

"Not they; they are deep enough for any wicked action," concluded Tod, as we went onwards.

It was tea-time then at Caramel Cottage, and they sat down to take it. Mr. Barbary was sociable and talked of this and that; Edgar Reste spoke hardly a word; Katrine busied herself with the tea-pot and cups. At dusk Ben Gibbon came in, and Katrine was sent to bear Joan company in the kitchen. Brandy and whiskey were put upon the table, Joan being called to bring in hot and cold water. They sat drinking, as Katrine supposed, and talking together in covert tones for two hours, when Gibbon left; upon which, Katrine was graciously told by her father she might return to the parlour. Her head ached badly, she felt ill at ease, and when supper was over went up to bed. But she could not get to sleep.

About eleven o'clock, as she judged it to be, loud and angry sounds arose. Her father and Mr. Reste had renewed their dispute—what-

ever its cause might be. By-and-by, when it was at its height, she heard Mr. Reste dash out at the back door; she heard her father dash after him. In the yard there seemed to be a scuffle, more hot words, and then a sudden silence. Katrine rose and stole to the window to look.

She could not see either of them. But a noise in the kitchen beneath, as if the fire-irons were thrown down, seemed to say they had come back indoors. Another minute and her father came out with a lighted lantern in his hand; she wondered why, as it was moonlight. He crossed the yard and went into the back kitchen, or brewhouse, as it was more often called, and Katrine, hoping the quarrel was over, got into bed again. Presently the back door was shut with a bang that shook the room, and footsteps were heard ascending the stairs, and afterwards all was quiet until morning.

As on the past morning, so it was on this. When Katrine got downstairs she found that neither her father nor Mr. Reste was up. She breakfasted alone, and set off for the Manor afterward.

But, as it chanced, she was to have partial holiday that day. Lena complained of a sore throat; she was subject to sore throats; so Miss Barbary was released when the lesson was half over and returned home.

Going to her room to take her bonnet off, she found Joan busy there. From the window she saw her father at work at the far end of the garden. This was Thursday, the day of the projected walk to Church Leet, and very lovely weather. But Mr. Reste had not said anything about it since the Tuesday afternoon.

"Is Mr. Reste gone out, Joan?"

"Mr. Reste is gone, Miss Katrine."

"Gone where?" asked she.

"Gone away; gone back to London," said Joan. Upon which Katrine, staring at the old woman, inquired what she meant.

It appeared that Mr. Barbary had left his chamber close upon Katrine's departure, and sat down to breakfast. When he had finished he called Joan to take the things away. She inquired whether they had not better be left for Mr. Reste. He answered that Mr. Reste was gone. What, gone away back to London, Joan cried, in surprise; and her master said, "Yes." "You might just have knocked me down with a feather, Miss Katrine, I was that took to," added Joan now, in relating this. "Never to say good-bye to me, nor anything!"

Katrine, thinking there was somebody else he had not said good-bye to, could hardly speak for amazement. "When did he go, Joan? Since breakfast? Or was he gone when I went out?"

"Well, I don't know," pondered Joan; "it seems all a moither in my head; as if I couldn't put this and that together. I never saw nor heard anything of him at all this morning, and I find his bed has not been slept in, which looks as if he went last night. It's odd, too,

that he didn't say he was going, and it's odd he should start off to London at midnight. Your papa is in one of his short tempers, Miss Katrine, and I've not dared to ask him about it."

Katrine, as she listened, felt perfectly bewildered. Why had he taken his departure in this strange manner? What for? What had caused him to do it? Joan had told all she knew, and it was of no use questioning her further.

Mr. Reste's chamber door stood open; Katrine halted at it and looked in. Why! he seemed to have taken nothing with him! His coats were hanging up; trifles belonging to him lay about on chairs; on the side shelf stood his little portable desk—and she had heard him say that he never travelled without that desk, it went with him wherever he went. Opening a drawer or two, she saw his linen, his neckties, his handkerchiefs. What was the meaning of it all? Could he have been recalled to London in some desperate hurry? But no letter or summons of any kind had come to Caramel Cottage, so far as she knew, except the letter from Captain Amphlett on Tuesday morning, and that one had not recalled him.

"There be two pairs of his boots in the kitchen," said Joan. "He has took none with him but them he's got on."

"I *must* ask papa about it," cried the puzzled Katrine.

Mr. Barbary was at the bottom of the garden working away at the celery bed in his shirt sleeves; his coat lay across the cucumber frame.

"What brings you at home now?" he cried out, looking up as Katrine drew near.

"The little girl is not well. Papa," she added, her voice taking a timid, shrinking tone, she hardly knew why, "Joan says Mr. Reste is gone."

"Well?"

"But why has he left so suddenly, without saying anything about it?"

"He could do so if he pleased. He was at liberty to go or stay."

Katrine could not dispute that. She hardly liked to say more, her father's answers were so curt and cross.

"He must have gone unexpectedly, papa."

"Unexpectedly! Not at all. He has been talking of going all the week."

Katrine paused. "Is he coming back, papa?"

"Not that I know of."

"But he has not taken any of his things."

"I am going to pack his things and send them after him."

"But —— *when* did he go, papa?"

Mr. Barbary, who had kept on working, drew himself bolt upright Letting his hands rest on the handle of his spade, he looked sternly into Katrine's face.

"He went last night."

"He —— he never told me he was going. He never said anything about it."

"And why should he tell you?" demanded Mr. Barbary. "It was enough that he told me. He thought he had been quite long enough away from his work, and that it was high time to go back to it. I thought the same. That's all, Katrine; you need not inquire further. And now you can go indoors."

She walked slowly up the narrow path, conscious that some mystery must lie behind this. Joan was standing in the yard, outside the back kitchen door, trying to pull it open.

"This here back'us door's locked!" exclaimed Joan, in her country vernacular. "I want the spare jack out; 't other's given way at last."

"It can't be locked," dissented Katrine. "It never is."

"Well, I've never known the door locked afore; but 'tis now, Miss Katrine. I noticed it was shut to all day yesterday, but I didn't try it."

"It is only stuck," said Katrine, laying hold of the high old-fashioned bow handle which served to lift the latch inside; and she shook it well.

"What's that? What are you about?" called out Mr. Barbary, dashing up the path like a flash of lightning. "Let the door alone."

"Joan says it is locked, papa," said Katrine, frightened by his manner.

"And what if it is? I have locked up some—some wine there that came in. How dare you meddle with the places I choose to keep closed?"

"It's the other jack I want out, master," said Joan, hearing imperfectly.

"You can't have the other jack."

"But, master, the old jack's broke clean in two, and it's time to put the loin o' lamb down."

"Cut it into chops," he cried, waving them both off, and standing, himself, before the door, as if to guard it, with a white, imperious, passionate face.

Single-minded old Joan went indoors, marvelling a little—such a bit of a trouble for him to have opened the back'us door and given her out the jack! Katrine followed, marvelling very much. She did not believe in the wine: felt sure no wine had come in; they never had any; what was it that was locked up there? All in a moment a thought flashed over her that it might be game: poached game: pheasants and partridges and hares. But, upon that thought came another: why should the spoil have been brought in on Tuesday night when it had never (as she believed) been brought before? Just a little came in for their own use, nothing more.

II.

THAT day, Thursday, we had news of Don. And we had it in this way. Tobias Jellico—who had a small draper's shop at Evesham, and went about the country with a pack, out of which he seduced unwary ladies to buy finery, more particularly some of our ladies living in Piefinch Cut—was at Church Dykely to-day on one of his periodical visitations. We did not like the man or his trade; but that's neither here nor there. Hearing that the Squire's dog was lost, he at once said he had seen Dick Standish that morning in Bengeworth (a portion of Evesham) with a large Newfoundland dog. White-and-brown, he called it; which was a mistake, for Don was white and black; but Jellico might not know colours. It was Mr. Duffham who brought us this news in the afternoon: he had been sent for to Lena, whose throat was getting worse. Duffham heard it from Perkins the butcher, to whom Jellico told it.

I don't know which item pleased the Squire most: that Don was found, or that the guilt of Tuesday night was traced home to the Standishes; for the three brothers had in general a certain gentleman's own luck, and were rarely caught.

"Don went out roaming, through that villain Giles unloosing him and leaving the yard gate open," decided the Squire, in his excitement. "The dog must have sprung upon them; he has a mortal enmity to tramps and poachers, you know, Duffham; and the Standishes captured him. I'll send a message to the police at Evesham at once, to look after Mr. Dick, and go over myself in the morning."

"Anyway, I'm glad the dog's found," said Duffham. "But what an idiot Dick Standish must be to allow himself to be seen with the dog in the public streets."

"Johnny," said the Squire, turning to me as he was leaving the room to send a man galloping on horseback to the Evesham police, "you run over to Caramel Cottage. Make my compliments to young Reste; say that I am going to drive to Evesham to-morrow morning, and shall be happy to take him if he likes to accompany me. I offered to drive him over some day before he left, but this bother has caused me to delay it. Shall start at nine o'clock, tell him."

About the time the Squire was charging me with this message, Katrine Barbary was sitting in the homely garden at Caramel Cottage, amidst the fruit trees, the vegetables, and the late flowers. The October sunlight fell on her pretty face, that somehow put you in mind of a peach with its softest bloom upon it.

Katrine was striving to see daylight out of a mass of perplexity, of which I then knew nothing, and she could not discern a single ray. Why should that fine young barrister, Edgar Reste, staying with them so peacefully for several weeks past, and fully intending to stay this week out—why should he have run away by night, leaving behind him

an atmosphere of mystery? This question would never leave Katrine's mind by night or by day.

Sitting there in the afternoon sun, she was running over mentally, for the tenth time or so, the details of the affair. One or two of them might have looked somewhat shady to a suspicious observer; to Katrine they presented only a web of perplexity. She felt sure that when she went to bed on the Wednesday night, he had no thought of leaving; and yet it seemed that he did leave. When Joan rose in the early morning, he had disappeared—vanished, as may be said. The puzzle that Katrine could not solve was this: why had he gone away in haste so great that he could not take his clothes with him? and why had he gone at all in an unexpected, stealthy way, saying nothing to anybody?

"It looks just as though he had run away to escape some imminent danger, with not a minute to spare," mused Katrine.

At this moment Katrine met with an interruption to her thoughts in the shape of me. Catching a glimpse of her print frock through the hedge, I went straight in at the little side gate, without troubling the front door.

"Sit down, Johnny," she said, holding out her hand, and making room for me on the bench. And as I took the seat, I said what I had come for—to deliver the Squire's message to Mr. Reste.

"Mr. Reste has left us," said Katrine. "He went away last night."

"Went away last night!" I exclaimed, the news surprising me uncommonly. "What took him off so suddenly?"

Open-natured as the day, Katrine told me the particulars (which proved that she had no dark fears about it as yet), of course saying nothing about the poaching. And she did mention the quarrel.

"It is so strange that he should leave all his things behind—don't you see that, Johnny?" she said. "Even that little desk, full of private papers, is left, and he never travels without it; his boots are left."

"He must have had some news to call him away. In a letter, perhaps."

"The only letter he has had lately came on Tuesday morning," returned Katrine. "It had a good deal of money in it in bank notes; sixty pounds; but it did not call him away. *Nothing* called him, that I can discover. You can't think how it is worrying me; it seems just a mystery."

"Look here, Katrine," I said, after mentally twisting the matter this way and that, "I've known the most unaccountable problems turn out to be the simplest on explanation. When you hear from him, as you most likely will in a day or two, I dare say he will tell you he was called away unexpectedly, and had to go at once. Does not Mr. Barbary know why he went?"

"Well, yes; I fancy he does: he is indoors now, packing Mr. Reste's things: but he does not tell me."

After talking a little longer, we strolled up the path together, and had reached the yard when Mr. Barbary suddenly opened the kitchen door to shake the dust from a coat that seemed covered with it. His handsome face took a haughty expression, and his slender, shapely form was drawn up in pride as he looked sternly at me, as much as to say, "What do you want here?"

I turned, on my way to the side-gate, to explain: that Don had been seen at Evesham in the company of Dick Standish, that the Squire would be driving thither on the morrow, and he had thought Mr. Reste might like to go with him.

"Very kind of Mr. Todhetley," drawled Barbary in his stand-off manner. "Tell him, with my compliments and thanks for his courtesy, that my nephew has left for London."

"Left for good, I suppose?" I said.

"For the present, at any rate. A pressing matter of business recalled him, and he had to attend to it without delay."

I glanced at Katrine: there was the explanation.

"So the dog is at Evesham!" remarked Mr. Barbary. "The Standishes are great rogues, all three of them, and Dick's the worst. But—I think—had you gone after him to-day, instead of delaying it until to-morrow, there might have been more certainty of finding him. Mr. Dick may give you leg-bail in the night."

"The police will see he does not do that; the Squire has sent a messenger to warn them," I replied. "I suppose you have not heard any more rumours about the poaching on Tuesday night, Mr. Barbary?"

"I've heard no more than was said at first—that the keepers reported some poachers were out, and they nearly came to an encounter with the rascals. Wish they had—and that I had seen the fun. Reste and I had walked to Church Leet and back that day; we were both tired and went up stairs betimes."

To hear him coolly assert this, to see his good-looking face raised unblushingly to the sun as he said it, must have been as a bitter farce to Katrine, who had believed him, until a few days back, to be next door to a saint for truth and goodness. *I* put faith in it, not being then behind the scenes. But we must get on, or this paper will spin itself out too much.

Mr. Barbary did his packing leisurely. Tea was over, and dusk set in before the portmanteau was shut up and its direction fastened to it. Katrine read the card. "Mr. Edgar Reste, Euston Square Station, London. *To be left till called for.*"

Very lonely felt Katrine, sitting by herself that evening, working a strip of muslin for a frill. *He* was not there to talk to her in his voice of music—for that's what she had grown to think it, like other girls in love. She wondered whether they should ever meet again—ever, ever? She wondered how long it would be before a letter came from him, and whether he would write to *her*.

Mr. Barbary appeared at supper-time, ate some cold lamb in silence, seeming to be buried in thought, and went back to the gun-room when he had finished. Katrine got to her work again, did a little, then put it away for the night, and turned to the book shelf to get a book.

Standing to make a choice of one, Katrine was seized with consternation. On the lower shelf, staring her right in the face, was Mr. Reste's Bible. It had been given him by his dead father, and he set store by it. He must have left it down stairs the previous Sunday, and Joan had put it away on the shelves amongst the other books.

"I wonder if papa would mind opening the portmanteau again?" thought Katrine, as she hastened to the gun-room, and entered.

"Papa! papa! here's Mr. Reste's Bible left out," she cried, impulsively. "Can you put it into the portmanteau?"

Mr. Barbary stood by the small safe in the wall, the door of which was open. In his hand lay some bank notes; he was holding them towards the candle on the deal table, and seemed to be counting them. Katrine, thinking of the Bible and of nothing else, went close to him and her eye fell on the notes. He flung them into the cupboard in a covert manner, gave the door a slam, turned an angry face on Katrine, and an angry tongue.

"Why do you come bursting in upon me in this boisterous fashion? I won't have it. What? Will I undo the portmanteau to put in a Bible? No, I won't. Keep it till he chooses to come for it."

She shrank away frightened, softly closing the door behind her. Those bank notes belonged to Mr. Reste: they were the same she had seen him put into his pocket book two days ago. Why had he not taken them with him?—what brought them in her father's possession? The advance shadow of the dark trouble, soon to come, crept into Katrine Barbary's heart.

In no mood for reading now, she went to bed, and lay trying to think it out. What did it all mean? Had her father conjured the pocket-book by sleight-of-hand out of Mr. Reste's keeping and *stolen* the notes? She strove to put the disgraceful thought away from her, and could not. The distress brought to her by the poaching seemed as nothing to this, bad though that was.—And would he venture abroad to-night again?

Joan's light foot-fall passed her door, going up to her bed in the roof. Once there, nothing ever disturbed the old servant or her deafness until getting-up time in the morning. Katrine lay on, no sleep in her eyes; half the night it would have seemed, but that she had learned how slowly time passes with the restless. Still, it was a good while past twelve, she thought, when curious sounds, as of *digging*, seemed to arise from the garden. Sounds too faint perhaps to have been heard in the day-time, but which penetrated to her ear unless she was mistaken, in the deep, uncanny, undisturbed silence of the night. She sat up in bed to listen.

There, it came again! What could it be? People did not dig up gardens at midnight. Slipping out of bed, she drew the blind aside and peeped out.

The night was light as day, with a bright, clear, beautiful moon: the hunters' moon. Underneath the summer-apple-tree, close at this end of the garden, bent Mr. Barbary, digging away with all his might, his large iron spade turning up the earth swiftly and silently. Katrine's eyes grew wide with amazement. He had dug up that same plot of ground only a few days ago, in readiness to plant winter greens: she and Edgar Reste had stood looking on for a time, talking with him as to the sort of greens he meant to put in. Why was he digging up the same ground again?—and why was he doing it at this unearthly hour?

It appeared to be a hole that was being dug now, for he threw the spadefuls of mould up on each side pretty far. The ground seemed quite soft and pliant; owing perhaps to its having been so recently turned. As the hole grew larger; wider and longer and deeper; an idea flashed over Katrine that it looked just as though it were meant for a grave. Not that she thought it.

Putting a warm shawl on her shoulders and slippers on her feet, she sat down before the window, drew the blind up an inch or two, and kept looking out, her curiosity greatly excited. The moon shone steadily, the time passed, and the hole grew yet larger. Suddenly Mr. Barbary paused in his work, and held up his head as if to listen. Did he fear, or fancy, a noise in the field pathway outside, or in the dark grove to the right near Caramel's Farm? Apparently so: and that he must not be seen at his work. For he got out of the hole, left the spade in it, came with noiseless, swift, stealthy movement up the yard and concealed himself in the dark tool-shed. Presently, he stole across to the little gate, looked well about him to the right and left, and then resumed his digging.

Quite six feet long it soon looked to Katrine, and three or more feet wide, and how deep she knew not. *Was it for a grave?* The apprehension really stole across her, and with a sick faintness. If so, if so—? A welcome ray of possibility dawned then. Had her father (warned by this stir that was going on, the search for poachers and their spoil) a lot of contraband game in his possession that must be hidden away out of sight? Perhaps so.

It seemed to be finished now. The moon had sailed ever so far across the sky by this time, but was still shining full upon it. Mr. Barbary crept again to the gate and stood listening and looking up and down in the silence of the night. Then he crossed to the brew-house, took the key from his pocket, unlocked it and went inside. Katrine could see the flash of the match as he struck a light.

When he emerged from the brewhouse he was dragging a weight along the ground with two strong cords. A huge, unshapely, heavy substance enveloped in what looked like matting or sacking. Dragging it straight over the yard to the grave, Mr. Barbary let it fall carefully

in, cords and all, and began to shovel in the mould upon it with desperate haste.

Terror seized on Katrine. What was in that matting? All in an instant, a little corner of the veil—that had obscured from her understanding so much which had seemed mysterious and unfathomable—lifted itself, bringing to her an awful conviction. Was it Edgar Reste that was being put out of the way; buried for ever from the sight of man? Her father must have killed him; must have done it in a passion! Katrine Barbary cried out with a loud and bitter cry.

Fascinated by the sight of terror, she was unable to draw her eyes away. But the next moment they had caught sight of another object, bringing equal terror, though of a different nature: some one, who had apparently crept in at the gate unheard, was standing at the corner of the garden hedge, looking on. Was it an officer of the law, come to spy upon her father and denounce his crime? But, even as she gazed, the figure drew back to make its exit by the gate again, and to Katrine it seemed to take my form.

"It is Johnny Ludlow!" she gasped. "Oh, I pray that it may be! I think *he* would not betray him."

Katrine watched on. She saw the grave filled in; she saw her father stamp it down; she saw him carry the superfluous mould to a place under the wall, near the manure bed, and she saw him stamp that down, and then cover it loosely with some of the manure, so that it might look like a part of the heap. Then he seemed to be coming in, and Katrine thought it must be near to morning dawn.

Crawling into bed, she hid her face, that never again ought to show itself amid honest men, under the clothes. Some covert stir yet seemed to be going on in the yard, as of pumping and scrubbing. Turning from hot to cold, from cold to hot, Katrine was seized with a shivering fit.

"And who really was it watching?" she moaned. "It looked like Johnny, yet I can't be sure; he stood in the shade."

But it was *me*, as the schoolboys say. And the reason of my being there at the small, unearthly hours of the morning, together with the conclusion of this appalling story, will be told next month.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

AMONG THE WELSH.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "The Cruise of the Reserve Squadron," &c.

Oldest House in Chester.

THE train that brings you to Chester will also take you from it: and one morning I said goodbye to the fair city with its ancient houses and walls, its ecclesiastical atmosphere, and went my way to North Wales. You very soon pass the boundary line between the two countries, and find yourself in Wales, though not in the centre of all its beauties.

The train entered a good deal of flat country. There were hills to be seen, but too far off to influence the landscape. And presently, making way, though not at express speed, we stopped at Flint, in the midst of a veritable black country. High chimneys sent forth volumes of smoke. The inevitable rows of small houses with dull slate roofs, that are so depressing, were of course there. A great trade seemed going on, and there were signs and sounds of activity without number. It was certainly good to think that all this rush and roar were so many tokens of prosperity, representing homes of peace and plenty to the frugal and industrious workman; but it was also good to feel that there was a world, and a very different world, beyond, and that in Flint we were to have no resting-place.

So passed away the smoky regions of Flint, with their ancient historical castle on the right, which, however romantic in itself, failed to make up for the want of romance about the town. We were soon revelling in an unclouded, unsmoked atmosphere, the sea on the right, fields on the left, and a range of undulating, fertile hills. It is one of the pleasant features of Welsh travelling that the train so often either skirts the broad and open sea, or that you catch lovely flashes of it in the distance. Now, it almost washes up to the very carriages, and you trace a white foamy line the whole length of some curved and exquisite bay, ebbing and flowing upon the dazzling sand with the soothing swish-swash that may be heard above the rattle of the

train. And now, far off, it may be between two ranges of green hills, you see a blue expanse of water, with white-winged boats upon its surface, that plunges you at once into an ecstasy and a delight.

In a moment you are a new man. If enervated before, you are braced up as if by magic. A few moments ago you felt unequal to the most trifling exertion; now you are ready for deeds of daring. The whole nervous system is revolutionised at the merest glimpse of the sea. What power has it which thus affects not the body only but the very soul of man? for we are transformed as much in the spirit as in the flesh, and if the one would do doughty deeds, the other feels equal to martyrdom. All the troubles of life, the nightmares of existence, the very skeletons in our closets, fall from us, and cease their gnawing, and are remembered no more. Is it that the shortness of time is realised when face to face with this eternal sea, which ebbs and flows and remains the same from generation to generation? Do we realise that, after all, the longest life and the keenest suffering pass as a tale that is told? Or is it that eternity itself is realised, and that however hard the journey, or severe the cross, or dark the night, the dawn is never far off which will herald in the everlasting daylight?

RHUDDLAN.

The train passed on "by hill and vale and sea," until it stopped at Rhyl, whose sole attraction lies in its sea and sands. These undoubtedly are enough to make it what the French would call the "paradise of children." The town is dull and uninteresting, and shows few signs of energy or enterprise; but it has a very long esplanade or promenade, an endless line of houses facing the water, a fine beach. And, after all, those who go to Rhyl during the summer months, go for the sea and the air and not for the town.

It is a splendid sea, and a long pier is washed by its waves. The sands are excellent, so flat and broad that a whole population might encamp thereon, and not find themselves unpleasantly crowded; whilst anxious mothers, losing sight of their (to them, if to no one else) precious

charges, need have no visions of closed eyes and pale faces and dripping forms. The hundred eyes of Argus, if they have them, may sleep, and they may calmly read their novels or do their crewel work, and feel that all is safe with the rising generation.

Rhyl, too, has the rare privilege of facing the north, and consequently is, or ought to be, the most healthy place in Wales. Only three places in all England and Wales do possess this advantage: Margate, Cromer, and Rhyl. The air of the two former is matchless. If Margate only possessed beauty of country it would be perfect. Unfortunately, it has nothing to recommend it but its grand sea and air, yet these have proved sufficient for its popularity; the popularity of the multitude if not of the few, the applause of numbers if not of senates.

Cromer, as yet, is small, and being more remote than Margate is less "advanced"—to use a term the Ritualists delight in. Not so very long ago, the streets of Cromer were lighted by oil lamps swung across the road and suspended in mid air by a rope. Now all that old-fashioned quaintness has disappeared; but they have not been able to widen the narrow streets or straighten those that are crooked, expand small rooms or heighten low ceilings. If Cromer widens it must be without the town; the small cluster of houses forming what was once an insignificant village perched upon a cliff, must always remain primitive and picturesque. To live in Cromer itself must feel very much like living in a bandbox or a lantern, for you may look into your opposite neighbours' windows, and, if they come forward to resent your curiosity, you have only to open your own window and shake hands with them by way of apology.

Rhyl is like Margate and Cromer only in so far as that it faces the north. The two former possess high cliffs, but Rhyl is on a level with the sea—an advantage in some ways, in others not so. The sea is infinitely finer and more majestic when you look down upon it from a height. Nevertheless the sea is very fine at Rhyl, and the air certainly felt very pure and bracing.

And in the neighbourhood of Rhyl there are lovely drives, especially through the Vale of Clwyd, which many think one of the prettiest valleys in Wales. This adjective indeed, expresses what it really is: a valley without strong points in the form of mountains or rushing torrents or any wildness of aspect. It is a smiling valley, with wooded slopes and gentle undulations and fair pastures, and a great deal of garden-like ground. Every now and then you come to great gates and ivy-covered lodges, admitting you to quiet retreats. In the midst of yonder cluster of elms and oaks a house lies hidden. Every now and then, in driving, you catch a glimpse of it, and feel what a different life is this from the hubble bubble of towns, where repose is not, and the windows of all the surrounding houses stare at you like so many great, blank, pitiless eyes that never sleep or rest or cease their watch.

In driving from Rhyl to the Vale of Clwyd, one of the first objects

of interest is the ruin of Rhuddlan Castle, a mere shell, with several round, massive, ivy-grown towers. But it stands well out against the clear background of the sky, overlooks the valley from its elevation, and is washed by the waters of the river. Low hills rise on the right, and a higher range beyond. A battle was fought here in 795 between the Welsh and the Saxons, and the poor Welsh had the worst of it. The castle, probably, was not built in those days, though its date is uncertain.

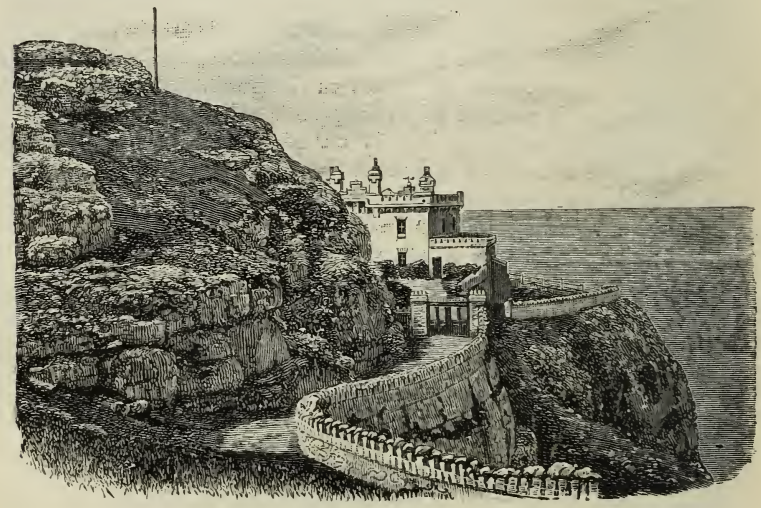
The village of Rhuddlan adjoins the ruin. It has seen better days. All its glory has departed. But on one of the houses there is an inscription which states that Edward I. held Parliament there. Passing this house, and going down hill, you cross the old bridge that dates back I know not how many centuries, and turn into the road for St. Asaph. Before reaching it you pass Bodelwyddan church, one of the chief objects of interest in this neighbourhood, and certainly one of the most perfect little churches in England. If not warned beforehand, one is amazed at finding so much beauty and refinement, so costly a building, in this out-of-the-world spot. Scarcely a house is to be seen near it, except the parsonage, and the graceful spire becomes a conspicuous object for miles round. The interior is an exquisite blending of many-coloured marbles and stained-glass windows; rich streams of subdued light fall upon the marble pavement and carved woodwork, and though the church has been opened twenty-five years, it is all as fresh and as pure as though it had been completed yesterday.

Leaving this beautiful building with reluctance, we continued our way to St. Asaph. The town is nothing more than a village, but it is very prettily situated on rising ground, whilst the river flows at its feet. The cathedral itself is not very interesting, but the See is ancient, and dates back to the sixth century. The best portion of the building, perhaps, is the chapter house in the south wing, with its long table and old chairs, and wonderful old books.

There was something very quaint and pleasant about the little town itself; an indescribable feeling that seemed more an influence than a positive reality; a quiet atmosphere that promised rest and repose. And there are times in our lives when nothing is so suggestive of happiness and luxury and paradise, as a Sleepy Hollow. Not that St. Asaph could ever be a Sleepy Hollow, for it is a city set on a hill; but if there can be a superlative to a Sleepy Hollow it must be a Sleepy Height.

After a pause at the inn opposite the cathedral, which I think was called the Plough—the interests and affections of St. Asaph are apparently agricultural rather than clerical—we went on our way to the Cefn caves; and if the caves did not reward us for our trouble, the drive itself did. It led through lanes and high banks and luxuriant trees. Lands undulating and richly wooded were on either hand, and everything announced the fertility of this lovely valley of the Clwyd.

Arrived at a certain gate, the driver announced that he could go no farther. The remainder of the distance—about a mile—must be walked, and it is certainly one of the loveliest walks in Wales, overlooking a valley which narrows until it becomes almost a ravine. The slopes were richly wooded—a great and unbroken extent of foliage. At the bottom of the valley, surrounded by trees, reposed a house, more out of the world than any we had yet seen. But lovely as it and its surroundings were, it was fearfully shut in, and those hill-sides must weigh down with an oppression that would soon become unendurable to any one who could not do without broad outlines—the expanse of the ocean, the far-off horizon, and the free air from the four quarters of the heavens, which is to many as the breath of life.



GREAT ORME'S HEAD AND LIGHTHOUSE.

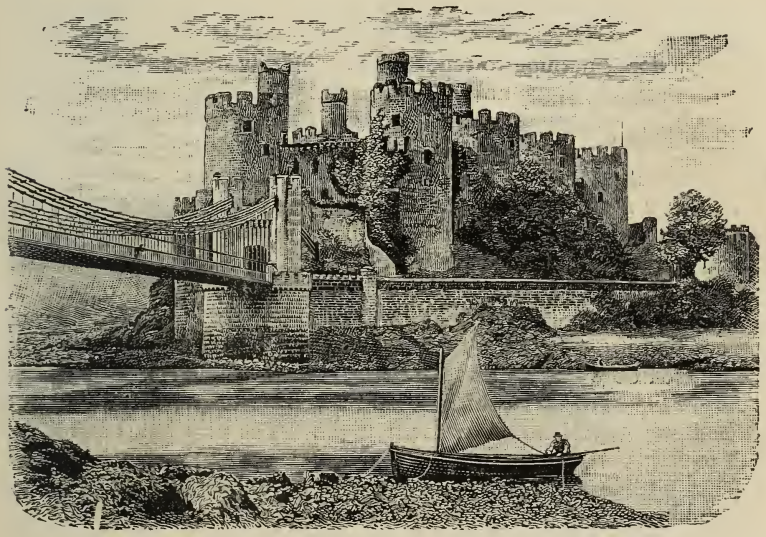
I walked on and on in this lovely valley, with high cliffs on the left. But the caves were not to be seen, and I began to wonder whether I had missed them. Presently there appeared a cottage, and at the door the neatest and civilest maiden I think in all Wales. She was trimly dressed, her hair beautifully braided, her face a picture. The caves, she said, were reached through the next wicket gate on the left, where I should find a girl who would act as guide.

The gate was soon found, indeed, but not the guide. She evidently was playing truant, for though searched for she was not forthcoming. In the absence of this Open Sesame the caves remained as a sealed book. They were locked and barricaded as though they contained the treasures of Aladdin's wonderful garden. Perhaps the loss was not very great; at any rate it was best to think so. But the view from the summit of the steep cliff repaid one for much trouble, and was better and more satisfying than all the caves in existence.

The exquisite valley lay far down in its whole length; the sun glinted on all the foliage that rustled and swayed in the wind; beyond all, far-off mountains reached towards the clouds.

I lingered as long as possible, for in Wales it is only now and then that you come upon these lovely views—views from which, as it were, you command the world. But the truant maiden never appeared; and when I returned and again saw that pretty and neat-handed Phyllis at her cottage door, her first question was: "Had I seen the caves?"

No; the caves were no doubt there, but must be taken upon trust. The genius of the caverns had forsaken her post.



Conway Castle.

Upon which Phyllis was visibly distressed, and immediately offered to fly off in search of her, or to accompany me herself: an offer which only want of time compelled one not to accept. It was made not with any wish for reward; that was evident as the broad daylight itself; but from a true spirit of kindness and hospitality and good feeling towards one's neighbour, which should exist in all hearts, and is the Second Great Commandment, but which one hardly expected to find in this remote region of the globe. And admirable as are the virtues in a plain woman, in a pretty one they are as sunshine upon a fair landscape, as rivers of waters in dry places.

I was obliged to content myself with thanking Phyllis and assuring her that her kindness was appreciated, and then made the best of my way back to Jehu, who waited at the gate in the main road. Apparently time had hung heavily upon his hands, or his favourite tap

at the Plough had produced a less exhilarating effect than usual, for he was buried in profound slumber. As I approached, he rolled heavily over in the dog-cart, dreaming possibly that he was an embodied earthquake ; his hat forsook him and went spinning down the road, and he woke with a start and a look that seemed to say he had gone through the crash of worlds.

Once more on the road, and travelling through this ever sunny, ever fertile vale of Clwyd, we in time reached Denbigh. I had somehow expected a good deal from Denbigh, and was disappointed. It was dull and somewhat dirty, and beyond the ruined castle on the hill possessed not a single point of attraction. The children in the gutters jabbered in Welsh ; women at the cottage doors looked uninteresting and unkempt, as the women in Wales are rather fond of looking ; doing nothing to relieve the peculiarity of the Welsh cast of countenance, which is not always beautiful. But the type varies wonderfully, considering the smallness of the Principality, and in some places the girls and women were as comely as in other parts they were the opposite.

The view from the ruins was extensive and beautiful, in spite of the grey afternoon shadows which now fell upon the landscape. A flat extensive plain, dotted about with hamlets, and silver streams and white roads, with a large stone building at the foot devoted to lunatics. They certainly are surrounded by pleasant country, if capable of appreciating it. The ruin is well-placed on the summit of the hill, but in itself does not possess very much that is attractive.

As for the town of Denbigh, I held myself fortunate that I had not pitched my tent here even for a night. The very inn, of which I wish to forget the name, was an object of gloom and melancholy, and was remarkable for nothing except a very fashionable charge for a very modest cup of tea. The market place itself was quaint without being at all picturesque, and is only lively on the respective days that the Market or the Cattle and Women fairs are held. Jehu thus briefly expressed himself, and if he placed the fair sex not a little lower than the angels, indeed, but a little higher than the animals, we feel sure that he spoke only according to his lights, and intended no disrespect to the better half of the world. When asked to explain the hidden meaning of his remark, it proved that he implied nothing more than that once a month—or at still longer intervals—women come here to be hired as servants, and placing themselves in a row, like soldiers at drill, run the gauntlet of the ladies and housekeepers in search of hand-maidens. In some parts of England this custom is called a "Mop," but Jehu did not know whether the by no means unappropriate term exists also in Wales.

On this day there was neither cattle fair, nor market, nor mop : the place was deserted and melancholy in the extreme, and I turned my back upon Denbigh without one sigh of regret. Twilight was falling, the country was closing in, and by the time we had made a round

which brought us again to St. Asaph, the cathedral was outlined against a dark blue sky, and the windows looked like great black eyes that stared weirdly at us and hurried us only the more on our way.

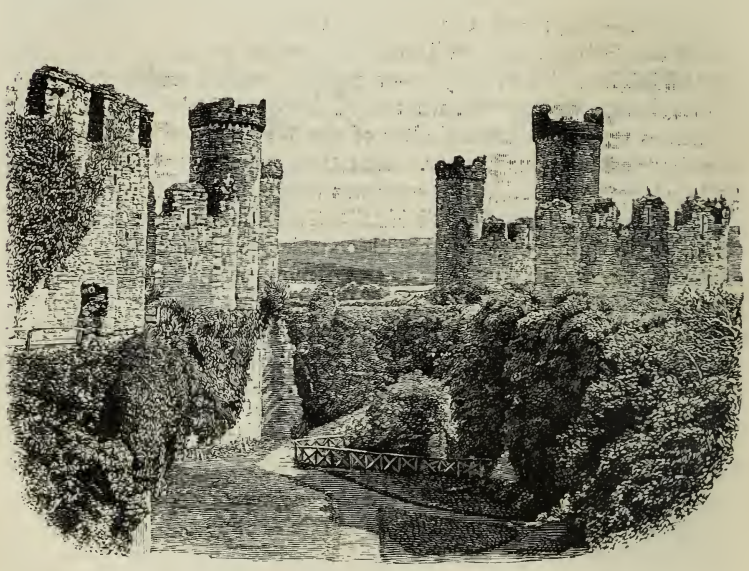
Down the hill, and over the bridge, and past the pleasant-looking Deanery, and out on the road to Rhyl. Rhuddlan loomed up in due time in dark and frowning outlines, and its ancient moat suggested all sorts of possible horrors and tragedies. Over the bridge and up the hill, and past the old Parliament House, and out on to the flat country round about Rhyl. We could see nothing of it now. It was quite dark; but in the distance, through a slight mist, gleamed all the lights of the town. A cold wind was blowing; the mist creeping up was damp and chilling; and the intelligent horse, which, if it did not measure our feelings, knew full well the extent of its own, hastened its speed. The lights of Rhyl grew rapidly nearer, and before long, and not before we desired, we turned into the esplanade, and were soon within the comfortable shelter of the Westminster Hotel.

We had earned our dinner. But that evening, as chance would have it, a large freemasonry banquet was being given in the hotel; and everyone knows that though, individually, freemasons are the most frugal of men, yet not one of them could conscientiously allow his brother mason to sit down to anything but the most sumptuous of repasts. This is a very right and proper feeling; but those who were not freemasons that night found that they had to retire humbly into the background. Punctuality was not to be thought of, and in a separate room one had to be thankful for small mercies. We came in for the ghostly dishes of the banquet; but if they were all a shade too cold, the ice-pudding was good enough to make up for them by being a degree too warm. But on such an occasion everything was excusable; only the most unreasonable of mortals would refuse to make allowances, and the hotel seemed one of the good old-fashioned sort, where the careful host (hostess in this case) personally, and with a due amount of conscience, looks after the well-being of his guests.

The next morning was bright, and the sea, sparkling in the sunshine, looked broad and beautiful. It rolled gently over the white sands, and was calm as if it had been Midsummer Day. The waiters, indeed, were evidently under the impression that the month was in reality June, and not "chill October;" for they threw wide the windows, propped open the door, and politely intimated that breakfast waited our pleasure in the full blast of a north-east wind. Not wishing to give them the further trouble of ordering a coffin, it was gently intimated that if doors and windows could be closed, the attention would be received with gratitude. This was at once done, but with an air that seemed to reflect upon so eccentric a request, and to wonder whether we had lately arrived from the torrid zone, or were followers in the footsteps of the Fire-Worshippers. Nevertheless, the hotel was very comfortable, and we left it hoping to see it again.

The journey from Rhyl to Llandudno is not a long one, but it

might be much shorter if the authorities would so arrange matters as not to keep one waiting at the junction. As a rule, more time is lost here than suffices for the whole journey. For a great part of the way the train runs along the coast, in full view of the calm blue sea and whatever white-winged boats may be disporting thereon. The sea at the junction has become almost a river—and quite a river as it pursues its way to Bettys-y-Coed. But just about here it is very tidal, and at low water lays bare wide reaches of strand, whereon you may perceive fishing-boats that, when the next tide comes up, will probably spread their sails and go out upon the waters, and let down their nets



Interior of Conway Castle.

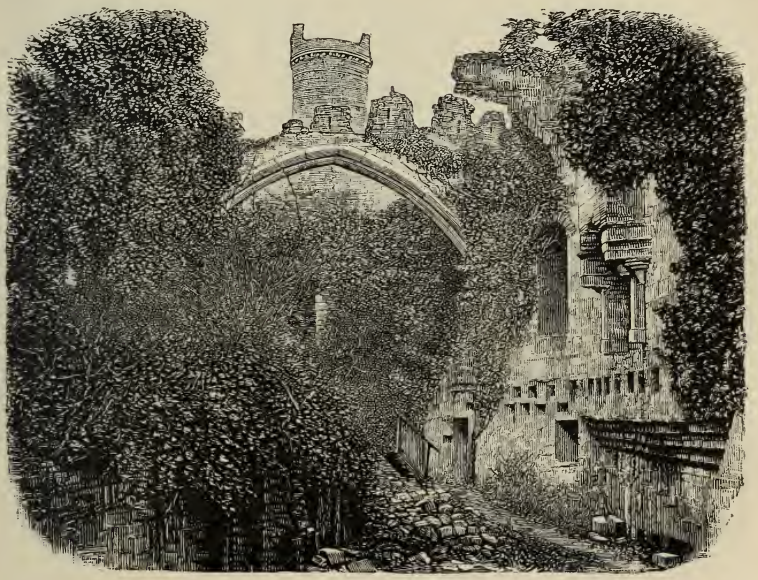
into the deep. For fishermen toil all night still, as in the days of the disciples ; and there are also fishers of men.

The view at the junction is very lovely, especially from the bridge, where the train is often kept waiting. At high water the sea covers a great space, and forms, as it were, a lake, surrounded by the most beautiful hills, not very lofty, but with broad, flowing undulations. On the right, quite on the other hand, reposes Conway, which has been compared in form to a Welsh harp. Certainly, from a distance, it gives out all the harmonies of nature ; Time and History have steeped it in romance, and for keynote to its silent melodies it possesses its unrivalled castle.

But the train passes through the unsightly tubular bridge, and all this is left behind, and you have before you the Great Orme's Head towering to the left and defying the sea with a bold front, which in

rough weather, and in such a storm as I first saw Llandudno, thunders against its base with a mighty roar, as if it would shake and shiver it to its very foundations.

Llandudno, you see at once, is a much more advanced and civilised place than Rhyl, and is more fashionable. It is also more sheltered. Great Orme's Head on the one side, and Little Orme's Head on the other, help to form the bay of Llandudno, and are some protection to the town. Of course there is an esplanade, and a long row of houses faces the water, but there is still a considerable extent of front yet to be built upon.



Remains of Banqueting Hall, Conway Castle.

Llandudno is divided into two distinct parts. That bordering the sea, is cold and bleak in winter, exposed to cutting winds and fierce gales. The place looks bare and deserted, and the hotels do not lay themselves out for winter visitors. At the time I was there, for instance, we dined each night six people in a room that would have held two hundred; and though the gale that was raging made the weather colder than anything we have had since, the public sitting room had a small fire at one end only, and people sat and shivered: with the exception of the selfish few—never absent, go where you will—who, regardless of everyone else, sat nose and knees in the fender, and comfortably roasted themselves.

The other aspect of Llandudno is much more sheltered. It lies snugly at the back of Great Orme's Head, its houses sloping upwards, warmed by a southern sun. So great was the contrast between the

two, that whilst on the Esplanade one had winter and looked above for snow clouds, here, in this Madeira of Llandudno, one almost expected to see sunny vineyards and gardens of roses. The latter, indeed, were in full bloom in many places. The sea ran up in an estuary towards Conway, and beyond it rose the cliffs and heights of Penmaenmawr, and the point of Anglesea, where the sea washes the shore of Beaumaris and swishes eternally round the ruins of its ancient castle.

But in summer and in warm autumn days, Llandudno no doubt is one of the pleasantest of the Welsh watering places. It has, of course, a pier, and its bathing is said to be excellent. There is a wide extent of sea, and the walks, drives, and excursions are innumerable. The surrounding country is broken and diversified, hills and dales possessing a great deal of pastoral beauty. It is not overcrowded with buildings, which indeed are few and far between, but here and there you come upon the remnant of an old farmhouse, or an old church sunken and surrounded by trees that would make the fortune of a picture, and are a pleasant break in the landscape. They are very fond of these sunken churches in Wales; very fond, too, of surrounding them with trees. You go down steps into the buildings as into a vault, and damp, dark and cold are they; presenting a dim religious light undoubtedly, but tending rather to religious melancholy than fervour of devotion.

All that day and all that night the storm raged with tremendous fury. The wind blew as it has seldom blown, and the next morning there was a vessel high and dry upon the beach. She had run ashore in the night, and the waves had beaten her into a wreck. But it was the third time, they said, that her captain had been sent ashore in this very spot, and as the vessel was very old and fully insured and no lives were lost, one's feelings were not so harrowed as they might have been under more deplorable circumstances.

In spite of the wind that was still blowing great guns, a flyman was found sufficiently bold to drive round the Great Orme's Head. This drive, or walk, alone might make the fortune of Llandudno. To-day the sea thundered at the base of the great rock, as immense waves came rolling in and dashed back upon themselves. The foam flew up in detached pieces, which were carried by the wind high up in the air, right over the cliff and out of sight like flocks of inebriated butterflies—only that butterflies never fly in flocks but in pairs, and certainly will never distil strong waters from the fair and frail flowers they so much resemble.

The road winds upwards, high and higher, and you overlook all this splendid sea, and drink in all the pure air. In summer, when you can get it to yourself, it must be delightful to lie on the top of that cliff, and gaze for ever on the lovely scene, and bask in the sunshine, and brace up the nerves in the vigorous air. Far down surges the restless sea. Out there is Puffin Island, where the wild birds build

and clang, and scream and chatter, and lay their eggs and rear their young. It is called Puffin Island, but is not sacred to those curious and parrot-beaked birds, that, to look at, seem neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring, but a little of each. Other birds are free of the island, whether by an amicable arrangement with the puffins, or by force of argument, or by strength of numbers, who can tell? Certain it is that the puffins have their territory by no means to themselves, but divide it with the black-backed gull and the greedy cormorant and the whistling sheldrake and the quick-diving, beautiful-winged guillemot.

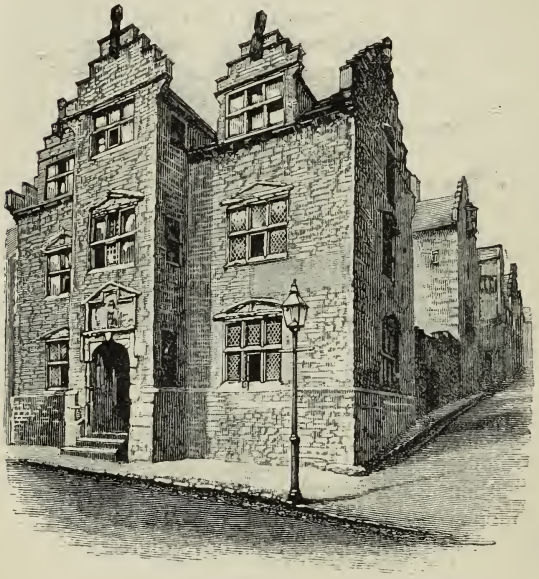
I love to dwell upon the sea birds; some of my happiest hours have been spent amongst them; the fresh breeze, the dash and flash of the sea, the bold, everlasting rocks with their caves and nooks and little harbours and recesses that somehow seem to possess about them the holiness of a sanctuary, the sacredness of creation's early dawn, so solitary are they, so devoid of man's presence and existence. Amongst these healthiest of influences we forget the world and its burden of care; we hold communion here with all that is grand and exalted in nature; we are filled with a wild ecstasy and delight that it would be vain to attempt to put into words. For the enjoyment of all that grandeur and happiness we seem possessed of a capacity that is not finite but infinite. It never palls or wearies, never grows stale and unprofitable. It has about it the freshness of eternal youth, of eternity itself. And wherefore not? It is the wide sea and the glorious rocks and the blue sky, and the clang of the wild bird is a fitting chant to these, not undertones, but grand diapasons in creation.

Going onwards in the drive round the Great Orme's Head, you very soon come to the lighthouse, and it is worth while making a slight halt to go over it. All lighthouses are worth a visit, if only to wonder at the beautiful way in which everything is kept. Here you see a good deal, including Puffin Island, which gave rise to the above digression. And beyond it, on a fine day, you may also trace the outlines of the Isle of Man; and the keeper, adjusting one of the telescopes, will bring out Penmaenmawr and all its rocky coast and sandy beach and sloping hills; and you may follow the railway by the long line of steam that skirts the water, and in one part really runs over it; and beyond, at the extreme point, the ruins of Beaumaris are dimly outlined against the sky.

As you go on, the road ascends, and turning gradually, you see Conway lying in the valley with its ancient castle, and, all about, you have a panorama of Welsh hills, rising behind each other in slopes and undulations and abrupt peaks. It is a lovely view, taken altogether. And then you come round quite to the other side, and if you are a stranger to Llandudno you will be surprised to find this "Madeira," that you never dreamed of, snugly lying at the back of the Great Orme; and if it is blowing such a "chilling blast" as put an end to the troubles of the Miller's Daughter—as it blew the day I write of—

you will long to take refuge in some hospitable house on the slopes of the hill, until the tyranny of the storm is overpast.

There was no such refuge to-day. Back into the town went Jehu, in the very teeth of the gale. It was almost impossible to get into the hotel, and once in, almost impossible to get out. There, close by, was the wrecked vessel; and mischievous boys, who are nothing if not jeopardizing their lives, were climbing the rigging like acrobats, and hanging from the mast head, and sliding down the ropes, and thinking amidst all their fun and frolic and danger that it was an ill-wind that blew nobody any good.



PLAS MAWR, AN OLD HOUSE IN CONWAY.

It was much calmer the next morning, and a drive to Conway, to inspect the old town and the castle, was the best thing to be done. It is a very pretty drive of four miles, through a fertile country, with distant hills to break the horizon.

Conway was once a much more important town than now, but it is still one of the most characteristic places in Wales, and one that ought not to be neglected. It lies on the left bank of the river Conway, and, it has been already said, somewhat resembles in form a Welsh harp. Its ancient wall still exists, with towers and battlements and gateways; dark walls, twelve feet thick, moss and ivy grown and of Moorish aspect.

In the town is one of the most interesting old houses in existence. It is called Plas Mawr, and bears the date of 1585. It is wonderfully picturesque, and you enter it and pass into a bygone age. Large rooms, carved panels, huge oaken fireplaces, beams supporting the ceilings, and mullioned windows that let in a daylight that seems quite grey with antiquity—all these signs and tokens of the Elizabethan age delight you at every turn. Inside and out, the house is in character with itself. Substantially built, it yet looks ready to crumble to ruin. It is an immense place, with separate entrances, and is occupied by many humble families; but it ought to be kept from all such use, and it should

be prized and honoured by the town. To live in such a place is to live in a refining atmosphere, not in the least understood or appreciated, it may be taken for granted, by those who now inhabit it in detachments.

The house is supposed to have been built by Robert Wynn of Gwydir, to whom all honour, and besides other initials, are those of E. R. and R. D., supposed to stand for Elizabeth and Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. I was told that very many who visit Conway never visit this old house, and if this be true they lose a pleasure only second to that of visiting the castle.

Conway castle is certainly the glory of North Wales, and is one of the most beautiful and romantic ruins in existence; perfect as a ruin, perfect in its site. It overlooks the estuary of the Conway, the town sleeping on the right, the distant sea, and vast ranges of hills. No element of beauty seems wanting in the panorama. The ruin dates back to the thirteenth century, to the days of Edward I., and must have been the pride of its monarch. It commanded the Pass of Penmaenmawr and the road to Anglesea. Though nothing now but a ruin, yet it is perfect in its decay. It has eight battlemented circular towers of immense size and thickness. They and the walls are ivy-grown and lichen-stained, and huge bunches of ivy overhang the courtyards, and brambles and bushes grow about the foundations, and ferns flourish in the shadows and grow to immense size.

Beautiful arches, light and airy, span the ruins, and seem ready to fall. You may trace the old banqueting hall, the King's and Queen's apartments and the oriel windows that lighted them. Beneath one tower is a dungeon, into which prisoners were thrown—unhappy mortals!—and left to die of hunger. Beneath another is the cavity which was the King's strong room and where he kept his treasure. On one side, the castle is bounded by the river, and many a victim in those barbarous days must have been hurled in secret into its cold and cruel waters.

But those days have all gone by with the youth and pride and glory of the stronghold. It has a glory still, but it is the glory of old age, it is the majesty of death. Never in the days of its youth could it have possessed such beauty as now, but this very beauty reads also its melancholy lesson—the lesson of change and decay; mutability; the ever-rolling stream of time, which bears onwards so swiftly succeeding generations. Tibni dies and Omri reigns; our tale is soon told; our years come to an end.

And, seeing that this life is only a prelude and introduction to that other Life, what an awful and solemn thing it is, with nothing in it that is little or that should be little; for it is a record graven with a pen of iron, of all the many failures and all the few successes, all the good and ill that is weaved into the warp and woof of our days; the laughter and the sunshine, the sighs and the tears, the witnessed happiness and the unuttered agony that all find their place in man's allotted three score years and ten.

HESTER.

By Mary Grace Wightwick, Author of "Mrs. Carr's Companion."

"OH! Hal! I am so sorry! I never thought of such a thing!"

"I should think you might have known when a fellow was in earnest I've gone on with no end of other girls before, but this is the real genuine thing. You must have seen all the summer how I've worshipped the very ground you trod upon. Look here!"

Hal dived into the recesses of a coat pocket somewhere near the region of his heart, brought forth a small paper package, and extracted from it a sharp fragment of white rock. Hester Conway looked on with interest.

"Quartz, isn't it?" she asked gravely.

He nodded. "You remember the picnic on Barricane Beach? You picked that up and gave it to me because it was a bore to carry, and I have kept it ever since."

Involuntarily Hester broke into a merry laugh, for she knew that impetuous Hal had been in love fifty times before, and would be fifty times again. But for the moment he was desperately serious, and Hester, repenting, grew suddenly grave again. "Oh! Hal! how I wish it had been something better worth keeping, and more—more comfortably portable. Pray throw it away, and let us forget all this nonsense."

"Impossible!" Hal stalked gloomily along between the high banks of the shady Devonshire lane where the two were walking, and looked moodily at his boots. "I'm not a fellow to fall in love one day and out the next, Hester! You must have a heart as hard as this stone, or you'd listen to me more kindly."

A look of distress came over her sweet face; she stopped and laid a hand upon his arm. "Dear Hal! forgive me for laughing. You chose such a funny keepsake! But, indeed, I can't give you any other answer."

"Not if I try again next year? I come of age next year."

"No, Hal; I could never think of you in that way."

"Then there must be some other fellow!"

"To account, of course, for my refusing anyone so extraordinarily fascinating as Mr. Hal Lester!" Hester answered, laughing again; but Hal was quick to perceive that she flushed to the very brow. His face fell.

"Well, I must make the best of it; but I envy that other fellow his good luck!" Hal sighed heavily, a sigh strangely out of accord with his sunny face, and the short silence which followed brought them to a turn in the long lane where the paths of the two branched apart—Hester's, by a grass-grown bridle-road, whose unkempt hedges

were illuminated here and there with sprays of flame-coloured bramble leaves, to the Rectory, hard by the old church tower—Hal's, through the massive gates of a broad carriage drive to the stately mansion brimful of wealth and luxury to which he was sole heir. At that moment Hal felt he would have gladly exchanged all—broad acres, house, and all the chattels thereto appertaining—for a "Yes" from the lips of the girl who stood facing him, holding out her hand.

"This must be goodbye, as you leave to-morrow. We are friends still; are we not, Hal? And I hope some day you will find someone ever so much nicer than I am, who will be able to love you as you deserve; and when you do, I'll welcome her as a sister!"

The promise was poor comfort to Hal, who could have dispensed with such passionless regard, and who felt at that moment—and perhaps would feel for the space of a whole week—as though his life's happiness were wrecked for ever. He walked on pondering, with some old suspicions revived within him. Could it be after all that she had really cared about that fellow Guest? and, if so, why had she let him go to Egypt when all Silvercombe knew she had only to lift her finger to have him at her feet?

Hester, for her part, had often lately asked herself the same question.

Alas! she did not know then, what she had found out since, that her old playmate Talbot Guest was more to her than anyone else ever could or would be. It was the old story:

> "How could I tell I should love thee to-day
> Whom that day I held not dear?
> How could I know I should love thee away
> When I did not love thee anear?"

Not until she had sent him away did Hester begin to find out how insipid and colourless the routine of daily life was without him. But it was not too late. Had he not said he should try again, and meantime make himself more worthy of her? The girl well remembered the stedfast look in his sunny eyes as he held her hand in a clasp which turned out to be one of farewell. Hester had left Silvercombe to visit some friends directly afterwards, and the next news she heard of her lover was a notification in the *Western Times* that Captain Talbot Guest, 4th Battalion of the Devon Rifles, had been appointed to a command in the Egyptian Army, and was leaving England immediately. That was only last winter; but already, in her dreams, waking and sleeping, Hester was picturing her hero's return from his harvest of glory, bringing his sheaves with him to lay at her feet. Hal's pleadings this November afternoon had recalled that to her thoughts which was never far away. With a rapid step and a happy light in her fawn-brown eyes, she hurried homewards through the gathering dusk.

Tea—that intrusive afternoon meal which we have all made so welcome to our hearths of late—was already waiting when she

reached the Rectory. The bright little kettle was steaming on the fire, but her sisters had not returned. There was only the rector in the hall putting on his overcoat.

"Going out again, papa! You have only just come in!" cried Hester in surprise, for her father usually held this hour with the newspaper (which only arrived at tea-time) sacred from disturbance.

"I am going on a sad errand, child. Those poor old people at Guestwycke!"

Hester's heart stood still. She seemed to know everything in a moment, and when her father spoke again it was no news he was telling her.

"There are terrible tidings from the Soudan. What a world it is! The son of their old age, and such a son as Talbot Guest! There, I can't wait. Take the *Standard* and read for yourself. I have to go and break the news. The doctor's a coward in such things; and Lethbridge says it is not his business, though he has managed all their affairs for forty years! Tell Dora where I am gone. I may not be home till late. Is the trap ready, William?"

The rector groaned to himself as he mounted the box-seat, and drove off. But Hester never uttered a sound. Silently she took up the newspaper and turned to the telegrams.

Disaster in the Soudan. Total defeat and annihilation of the expeditionary force. Hicks Pasha and all his staff slain. A few lines told all that was known. The decoy of the unsuspecting general into the death-ravine—the ambuscade on the heights—the three days' agony of thirst under ceaseless, pitiless fire—the survivors' story of the dead soldiers, British and African, lying together in the bloody soil.

Then followed a list of the officers of Hicks Pasha's staff. Hester glanced down the fatal column till she came to this paragraph:

"Captain Talbot Guest was an officer on the staff of Hicks Pasha, who greatly distinguished himself at the battle of Assalia early in the year. He was the last surviving child and heir of John Guest, Esq., of Guestwycke, in the county of Devon, and Mary, his wife, only daughter of Christopher Talbot, Esq., of Highleigh, Cumberland. Captain Guest was only twenty-six years of age and an officer of great promise."

It was late when the rector returned, tired and wet with his drive in the drizzling rain which was now falling fast—Devon fashion. A slight, dark figure, with a pale deathly face, met him in the hall and silently took his dripping overcoat. Dora and Kathleen, tired of waiting, had gone off to bed. Only Hester remained to receive her father. She warmed his slippers at the fire and poured out the coffee she had kept hot for him, all with the same serene impassibility.

Her father sat down by the fire, and stretched himself, and sipped the fragrant coffee before he spoke.

Hester waited silently.

"Well, child! I have had a sad time. Poor John Guest! He has seen four sons go before him, and now the old place must fall to strangers! Not that the mother thought of that, poor thing! She brought out all Talbot's letters to show me, Hester, and told what a good son he had been to them, and praised him and wept by turns. Not a word of repining or complaint. Their patience preached me a lesson, I tell you."

The rector spoke fiercely, perhaps to hide his feelings, and swallowed down a lump which rose in his throat.

"Oh! by-the-by, Mrs. Guest wants you to go and see them. 'If you did not mind,' she said, so sweetly, so humbly, always thinking of others before herself."

"When, papa?" Hester's voice sounded strange and untuneful.

"She is going to send the carriage for you to-morrow afternoon, and hopes you will contrive to spend a night or two at Guestwycke. You are a good hand at comforting people, Hester. Do what you can for them."

Guestwycke was a fine old Tudor manor-house, lying high above the river, which later on, after many windings, rushed through Silvercombe on its way seawards. It was built of red sandstone, and was smothered twice a year in purple wistaria blossom. But the flowers had faded and gone now like everything cheerful about the place; the windows were veiled as Hester drove up, the silence seemed to speak audibly of the calamity which had befallen.

Guestwycke. How many happy hours Hester had spent there in the old times never to come again! How many a warm welcome had she received in the dim old hall which was the glory of the Manor House. Now she was drawn silently into an embrace almost convulsive in its fervour, and, blinded with fast-falling tears, was led into the darkened library.

"The good child has come, John. Here she is!" Mrs. Guest took Hester's hand in hers and drew her to the fireside where the master of the house sat in his great leathern chair. He was older than his wife by many years, but the storms of life had failed to ruffle the serenity of the fine old face; those aristocratic, clear-cut features were stamped with the impress of a noble mind.

As of Abou Ben Adhem in the pretty Eastern legend, so it might have been written of John Guest in the celestial records that "he loved his fellow-men." "Let there be no ill-feeling," was a saying always on his lips, for in his large heart that charity found a place which is more than almsgiving, which bears, believes, hopes all things, and thinks no evil. And in all the country-side there was no man more loved and respected by poor and rich than the Squire of Guestwycke.

Grief confers strange dignity. Hester felt awed as though in a royal presence as she sat between her kind old friends. Hers were the only tears that fell, for the fount of sorrow soon runs dry in aged eyes.

But the sight of the girl's sweet face saddened by their grief—for the simple old couple never guessed at her own share in it—seemed a comfort to the poor parents in these first days of their loss.

From childhood Hester Conway had been a frequent visitor at Guestwycke, and sweet, sad memories lurked for her at every corner. Up and down the shady avenue Talbot had led her old pony when he first taught her to ride—upon the shining beaches of the river rippling below—dull now, and grey with the gloom that was everywhere this dreary November. They had floated lazily through summer afternoons; on this very shady bank they had lingered last autumn when he had asked her to be his wife. What issues—though she knew it not—had depended upon her answer!

One word from her, and Talbot would have stayed to be the comfort of his parents and in good time to play his part in life as master of Guestwycke, an honest country Squire like his father before him. And now Hester felt that his death lay at her door!

She pictured him toiling, tired and athirst, across the arid desert, thinking of her as he rode wearily on. She pictured the three days fighting face to face with Death in that terrible ravine amid the thunder of guns from the heights above, amid thirst, and weariness and despair, till the merciful messenger brought its almost welcome summons. Or did he fall early in the battle? and was that beloved head with its dark curls trampled in desert-dust by friend and foe? Oh! it was too horrible! And it was she who had goaded him away from his safe, peaceable life at Guestwycke—goaded him to his doom! Should she ever dare confess as much to the poor parents who mourned the son of their old age? Hester felt almost guilty in receiving their caresses. If they had but known! She crept away into solitude whenever it was possible, to weep her heart out in miserable self-reproach.

She had not thought it possible to endure grief more bitter than she suffered during those two days at Guestwycke, but her cup as it seemed was not yet full.

II.

While the mourning parents at Guestwycke went heavily, and Hester's sorrow sought relief in tears, a strange piece of gossip was convulsing the little world of Silvercombe. The Rector's William had it from the ostler at the Red Dragon, who had it from the kitchen-maid whose mother chared for all the best families, who had it from Mrs. Tracy's own maid Maria, who surely ought to know whether her mistress were engaged or not! And engaged it appeared she was—or rather had been since the poor gentleman was dead—to Captain Talbot Guest of Guestwycke. And that Maria would swear to, for her mistress had told her so with her own lips! And were not mistress and maid both busy as bees stitching away at the mourning, besides what was ordered from Exeter for bettermost wear?

The breathless excitement among the people of Tahiti when their King Pomare instituted Christianity by cutting up and eating the sacred turtle—the sensations which stirred the simple islanders of Hawaii as Queen Kapiolanl, descending to the brink of the fiery crater, plucked a handful of Pele's consecrated berries—could not well have exceeded the commotion created in Silvercombe as this piece of news ran like a magnetic current through Maria and her gossips, and finally by way of the Rector's William, who served as conductor, to the gentry of the village.

Mrs. Tracy was a pretty young widow, who in social life had lately proved herself a formidable rival to the Silvercombe girls of less experience. She had established herself some twelve months since in the best apartments the primitive little place afforded, and seemed in no haste to quit them, though it was understood that she was merely on the wing to other climes. What share her interest in Captain Guest had in detaining her at Silvercombe was best known to herself, but however well-founded had been her hopes of one day reigning at Guestwycke as his wife, they were now shattered for ever. But the fact of the conquest alone increased her importance immensely in Silvercombe society. The charming young widow had of course been credited with vague aspirations, matrimony-wards, but that she should have aimed so high and brought down her bird . . . . . Silvercombe could not recover its astonishment.

Public opinion had always hitherto destined Hester Conway for the heir of Guestwycke, but now it underwent a change. People felt how impossible it was that Hester with all her sweet grace and gentle dignity should ever have aspired to rival Mrs. Tracy's maturer, more astutely managed charms.

The Hester who returned from Guestwycke at the end of the week, pale and wan, with dark rings encircling her beautiful fawn-like eyes, pointed the contrast all the more strongly. As usual the person most concerned was the last to hear the news which had been worn threadbare with discussion during her two days' absence. To her sisters' surprise she received it with total incredulity.

"I don't believe it!" she said bluntly, turning suddenly upon Dora with a pale, proud face.

"My dear Hester, she says so herself! Surely she ought to know. And indeed, now we come to think of it, they were a great deal together while you were away the early part of last winter, before he went abroad."

"It's uncommonly strange; but she has actually put on mourning for him, so of course it must be true," supplemented Kathleen. "Poor Talbot! You know we used to tease you about him at one time, Hester; indeed, all Silvercombe thought——"

"Good-night. You must tell me all the news to-morrow; I am too tired to talk to-night. Please send me up a cup of tea presently; I won't come down again."

Hester took up her wraps with her usual quiet dignity, and, head erect, marched upstairs. If she were wounded, none should know it. But she was *not* wounded. No such false report should destroy her faith in Talbot, *her* lover, alive or dead! The girls had made a mistake. It could not be true!

Next morning, Sunday, she cased herself as it were in armour of proof, and went off to church. In her quiet corner, hidden from the congregation by the old carved pulpit, she was not pained by glances of either wonder or pity, nor by the sight of Lorette Tracy in her fashionable mourning, wiping away an occasional tear with a black-bordered handkerchief. But an ordeal awaited her when the service was over.

As she emerged by the chancel door, intending to escape the usual greetings in the churchyard, and steal quietly home by the private path to the Rectory, she was waylaid by a graceful figure in trailing black robes, who stood barring her way with outstretched hands.

"Dear Hester! the very person I most wanted to see! You were at Guestwycke yesterday, Do tell me how are the dear old people? You know of course"—with a keen glance at Hester's pale face—"you know the tie which binds us together? You have heard that poor Captain Guest and I . . . . ." She paused, a pause suggesting uncontrollable emotion, and passed a handkerchief lightly over her eyes.

"I know you say you were engaged to him, if that is what you mean, Mrs. Tracy," Hester answered bluntly, trying to disengage the hand which the widow retained in her own.

"We kept our secret well, I think," Mrs. Tracy faltered gently, "but now I have thought it right to let his parents know all that passed between us, and how dear he was to me."

Hester, wrapped in her panoply of proud reserve bowed with grave indifference, and made as though she would pass on.

"I have begged for an interview directly they are able to bear it. Meantime it has been such a relief to know you were with them—you who knew my poor Talbot so well . . . . . !"

Hester wrenched away her hand quite fiercely. "Excuse me, Mrs. Tracy—my father is waiting." The torture was more than she could bear. There were limits to endurance; and though she mistrusted Lorette Tracy, and her heart clung obstinately to its belief in Talbot's fidelity, her reason was beginning to yield. What if the report were true? Who could blame him if, hurt at her cold rejection, he had consoled himself elsewhere, and carried his suit where it would find more ready hearing? If only it had been anyone else! Hester moaned in her despair.

The girl had left the Manor House with a promise to repeat her visit to Talbot's parents as soon as possible. It had been arranged between them that the Rector should drive her over one morning early in the following week, and leave her to spend a long day with her old friends.

Hester for her part burned with a feverish impatience to find herself once more at Guestwycke. Perhaps amid the old scenes her faith in Talbot would revive, and this horrible conviction which was forcing itself upon her would loose its hold. Alas! poor Hester!

Upon her arrival at Guestwycke on Tuesday morning she found the quiet household stirred into gentle commotion. A fire burned in the large seldom-used drawing-room; freshly-cut hot-house flowers were disposed about the tables. Mrs. Guest came to meet her in a strange flutter of excitement, though with the usual affectionate welcome.

"My dear! You have heard the news! How little I guessed it when we last talked together! Mrs. Tracy comes to us this afternoon —we could not do less than ask her here—she who would have been our poor boy's wife!" The old lady's lips quivered. She made her young visitor sit beside her on the old-fashioned couch and began unfastening her wraps with trembling fingers.

"Dear Hester! you will not mind driving back in the sociable this evening? The barouche must go for Mrs. Tracy; we must show her every honour for Talbot's sake; or, better still"—with a sudden happy inspiration—"won't you stay a few days and help us entertain her?"

"No, no; impossible!" Hester broke out, smitten with sharp and sudden pain.

Mrs. Guest turned with a mild surprise in her bright old eyes.

"My dear! I would not press you against your will. You have many duties and engagements, I know."

Hester recovered herself with an effort. "Dear Mrs. Guest! I am always so happy here! Some day when you are alone again. One visitor at a time will be enough for you."

"Ah! well! it seems all so strange! If Talbot had but trusted us with his secret! Did you never suspect it, Hester? You and my poor boy were always friends; indeed I once hoped" . . . . passing her hand caressingly over the girl's auburn hair.—"But it was not to be!"

Hester writhed under the kind touch which almost broke down her composure. She could not speak a word.

"You know this lady, I think, my dear," Mrs. Guest went on. "Tell me, what is she like? Pretty? Gentle? Well-mannered?"

"Oh! don't ask me!" poor Hester broke out, in uncontrollable agony. Her overcharged heart seemed bursting with pain. Then in a stifled voice: "I know—so little—about her."

"I am not fond of strangers," sighed Mrs. Guest. "I wish you could have stayed, Hester!—But of course she is very nice, and we are sure to like her; dear Talbot's choice!" the mother consoled herself softly.

As Hester in the humble sociable reached the end of the avenue that afternoon, the returning barouche dashed in at the great gates of Guestwycke. The groom who was driving her pulled up to make

way for it, and its occupant, Mrs. Tracy, leant forward with a bow and a smile. A smile of triumph Hester thought bitterly. And this was the rival who had supplanted her, who was to take her place at Guestwycke as the child of the house!

It had been some comfort to her sore heart to think she could be of use to Talbot's dear ones. To cherish and care for them—to fill the place he had left empty—what else was left to her! Poor Hester covered her face, and in her loneliness and humiliation broke into a flood of tears. The blow had fallen so heavily, sweeping away all at once not only the peaceful present, the hopeful future,—it was the past also, the past, with all its memories which had vanished in an hour. Chance words she had treasured,—a look here and there, reserved, as she thought for her and her only—the touch of a hand. Even the right to mourn the dead had been taken from her. What remained to make life worth the living?

III.

A telegram was thrust into Hester's hand as she presently crossed the Rectory threshold; a summons from her eldest sister, Mrs. Ormsby. Hester always thought afterwards it must have been by her good angel's special provision that measles made its appearance in the Ormsby household just at this particular time. She obeyed the rather incoherent telegram, and flew to Taunton to her sister's help. Mrs. Ormsby had five little ones who all succumbed in turn, and kept Hester's hands full as she glided from one bedside to another, smoothing the pillows under feverish little heads, or carrying cooling drinks to parched lips, or answering appeals from fractious convalescents.

Janet was a motherly sort of body, with no conception of any world beyond her nursery, nor an idea that it was possible for Hester to have any interests beyond a brew of black-currant tea, or the spreading of a linseed poultice. At times Hester scarcely thought so either. The clamouring little voices, and the steam from bronchitis kettles shut out bitter thoughts and painful memories. They faded into the dim distance in face of the absorbing necessity of seeing that Jack did *not* take cold, and that Mysie *did* take nourishment. Those two cost the mother and aunt many a wakeful night of nursing, long after the robuster ones were safely convalescent.

Perhaps it was no wonder that as the strain relaxed and the caretaking grew less arduous, Aunt Hester should droop and lose her bright colour. Although Janet was so comfortably unobservant, she could not help noticing it. Of course it was the want of sleep and the warm rooms. Hester was always such a one for air. She must come with them to the seaside and recover tone. So a week later found them all wandering over the sands at Morthoe, an out-of-the-way corner of the world after Hester's own heart.

Long before this, people had quite left off talking about the disaster in the Soudan. The news was some weeks old now, and so many things had happened since. There had been a terrible murder of quite too-interesting barbarity. War was pending between Wamkong and Chochofoo, two rival Kings of the Gold Coast, because of an insult offered to the sacred tomahawk of the former; Mr. Gladstone had delivered a brilliant speech in Mid-Lothian, making bountiful use of language to conceal thought; he had also cut down one tree, and planted another with a silver spade. Oh, these were stirring times! Who had leisure to remember a handful of Englishmen massacred in someone else's quarrel? The world revolved on its axis still; nothing was changed or put out of joint, as one somehow feels it ought to be by one's individual sorrow. Only at Morthoe a sad and silent woman moved through life with all the hope crushed out of her.

Could she only have known for certain that she had a right to weep! If but for one moment Talbot could have come back from the realms of peace to tell her the truth—Was he hers still or that other's—Hester felt she could have borne it better. A wild longing, which was almost a prayer, would come over her sometimes, as she wandered on the rugged shore washed by the wild Atlantic; and she would scarcely have been surprised to see the familiar form of him who had been her lover—yes, once! thank Heaven for that!—step forth from out the shadow of those weird rocks, with the farewell smile still on his lips and the love-light in his eyes.

But no miracle interrupted the course of nature. The dark mysterious rocks, which seemed like the portals of the unseen world, disclosed no secrets. Hester's aching heart found no response to its questionings in earth, or sea, or sky. But even our unuttered prayers are answered, though perhaps not always just in our own way.

While they were still at Morthoe, one morning—a morning which Hester Conway will never forget—a letter and newspaper were carried up on the tray with the early cup of tea which she took, invalid-fashion, upstairs. Dora's letters were not wont to be exciting, and Hester, opening it, read with rather languid interest, till she came to this strange paragraph:

"I send you a paper with an account of the rejoicings at Guestwycke on Talbot's return. All went off well (we were there, of course), and the poor old people's quiet happiness was a sight to see. Isn't it a strange romantic kind of story! The hero of the day asked particularly after you, and seemed rather annoyed at your absence. I did not dare mention poor Lorette to him. Didn't you laugh over her imposture? If Talbot had not turned up again the truth would actually never have been known at all! Mrs. Tracy was staying with friends at Exeter when the news of Talbot's safety reached Guestwycke. Mr. Guest sent her a telegram at once, and the very next day Lorette wrote to her landlady here, throwing up her rooms and ordering all her belongings to be sent to her at Exeter directly.

It seems she does not intend to show her face in this neighbourhood again. Of course, you won't be surprised to hear that Talbot's good father and mother have quite forgiven her, and paid the month's bills she left owing!"

Hester put her hand to her head in dazed bewilderment. Was she dreaming? Had Dora lost her senses?—Or was it possible—barely possible ——

She took her letter, and without even waiting to coil up the auburn hair, which rippled over her shoulders, rushed to her sister's room.

"Janet! I have heard from Dora. What does she mean? Was the report about Captain Guest untrue? Did he escape?"

"My dear, there was no need to escape. Luckily for him he was safe at Khartoum on sick leave all the time. Didn't I tell you? His mother sent you a message. Perhaps I forgot to deliver it. Ah! I remember now; it was the day Mysie was so ill!"

"I heard nothing of it until this moment." Then—very low—with down-bent head; "And Lorette Tracy, Janet, was that tale false, too?"

Mrs. Ormsby laughed heartily. "Oh! Dora has been telling you the *dénouement* of that story, had she? It seems her engagement was all a fabrication. Ingenious, wasn't it? She would never have been found out, either, if her supposed fiancé had not come to life again so opportunely! Mac did laugh when I told him about it. He always rather admired Mrs. Tracy. Now Hester, help me to think. Had I better order tapioca or sago for the chicks to-day? *Mysie* likes sago best, but Jack . . . . "

Domestic details such as these, however, had no power to invade the dream-land where Hester was wandering this morning. She evaded the children, and as soon as she could, hurried away by herself to carry her joy where she had carried her sorrow: to the lonely shore.

The purple sea was sparkling and dancing under the blues of Devon skies; the white foam was throwing a lace mantle over the lower levels of the jagged rocks, and leaping over higher and higher towards the white quartz pinnacles which crowned them. Nature with strange sympathy had shed a sunshine and brilliance over all the beautiful bay. Hester, well-wrapped, sat long and contentedly under the shelter of a great brown ironstone giant looking out on the sparkling waters, till a shadow fell upon the book lying so uselessly open on her lap.

It was Colonel Ormsby's daily habit to come and escort her home, and being still but feeble, for her spirits were a-weary, she had been glad of her kind brother-in-law's strong arm to help her up the cliff.

But to-day a new courage braced her limbs. She looked up with a smile, one of her old smiles.

"I can do without an arm to-day, Mac," she was beginning, but the words died on her lips.

The new-comer was even taller and broader than Mac. His moustachios bristled fiercely, and he was bronzed by desert suns to the tint of an Arab chief.

"Mac has sent a deputy to-day, Hester," he said, smilingly.

She remained dumb in trembling surprise, utterly unable even to gasp out a welcome. But perhaps the light in her eyes spoke for her, for Talbot Guest threw himself down beside her and seized her hands.

"Oh, Hester! *You* at least might have known me better!" Then, as still she did not speak: "Hester!" very wistfully—"Hester!—I have not changed . . . . !"

"But I have," she whispered softly.

And in another moment her head lay on his shoulder (they were so safely out of sight), and this bold wooer, whom Lorette had claimed for her own, was holding her against his heart in a clasp which defied a world to take her from him.

Colonel Ormsby and his wife walking down to the shore later, met the pair climbing the cliff together, a pretty impersonation of Love's Young Dream. Hester, who found that she *did* need support after all, leant on Talbot's arm, while he, tall, bronzed, and soldier-like, was looking down tenderly into her fair face half hidden by a wind-blown tangle of auburn curls. She had been telling shyly, with hushed breath, of the *Via Dolorosa* her feet had so lately trodden, and listening with pitiful tears in her sweet eyes to his tale of the dangers he had passed, and of the short, sharp, merciful illness which had been a blessing in disguise.

Mrs. Ormsby looked at her husband significantly.

Hester's brother-in-law gave an expressive whistle, and began to hum under his breath: "*Oh! there's nothing half so sweet in life . . .*" Both guessed what had happened and were ready with their good wishes.

But the warmest congratulations came from Guestwycke, where John Guest and his good wife soon had the joy of welcoming a daughter-in-law after their own heart. We may be sure that the flowers bloomed brightly, and the place wore its gayest aspect for this visitor who came to take up her abode there for good and all.

"It is what we always wished, Hester," said Mrs. Guest, her bright old eyes shining with happiness. "I never could take to that Mrs. Tracy, even before she turned out an impostor."

"Hush! my dear!" reproved her husband, gently. "Hester knows how much we love her," taking his new daughter's hand in his, and patting it affectionately; "and I think that there need be no ill-feeling!"

A GLOVE'S EVIDENCE.

"PUT up the shutters, Tommy, and fasten the door," called Mrs. Toppin from her snug parlour behind the shop.

"'Tain't seven yet. Wants five minutes by the church clock," objected the boy, who, with his hands in his pockets, was standing on the doorstep watching the heavy thunder-shower.

"Do as you're bid, lad." Whereon Tommy went out reluctantly to perform his task. He had fastened the last bar of the shutters, re-entered the shop, and was about to close the door, when he felt it pushed gently from without.

"Oh, please let me in," implored the soft voice of a girl, who was enveloped from head to feet in a long waterproof, the hood of which partly concealed her face.

"But we're shut up for the night, miss."

"Only the window; and I don't want to buy wools or embroidery cotton, or anything of that sort. I wish to see Mrs. Toppin."

"On business?"

"Yes."

The boy disappeared into the parlour, and Mrs. Toppin at once came into the shop.

"Well?" she said, not by any means with a conciliatory tone or manner.

"I wish to enter my name for a situation. You keep a registry office, I believe?"

"I do—for *servants*." And the woman looked, with a practised eye, a little dubiously at the tall, graceful figure of the girl, marking her soft voice and refined manner as she asked, laying a shilling on the counter: "Will you write down my name, please?"

Mrs. Toppin put on her business manner, with her spectacles, in a moment, and having desired her boy to light the gas, she took a large book from a drawer, dipped a pen into the ink, and said, oracularly—

"Name?"

"Margaret Johnson."

"Age?"

"Twenty-two."

"What capacity?"

"Anything."

"I suspect you've not been out before, young woman. You'll require a character, you know."

The girl took a letter from her pocket, which she silently handed to Mrs. Toppin.

"Canon Bywell begs to certify . . . Margaret Johnson . . . Church of England . . . well educated . . . high moral character

. . . do her duty in any capacity . . . orphan . . . father, a tutor, died penniless a few months since . . . daughter left to support herself."

Having made entries in her book to the above effect, Mrs. Toppin gave back the letter, and turned over several leaves of the volume before her. Then, running her forefinger quickly down the page, she arrested it suddenly. Looking up sharply over her spectacles, she said :

"Lady Jakes wants a maid immediately. To a qualified young person a liberal salary will be given. One who has lived in a high family preferred."

"I am afraid I cannot fulfil these requirements ——"

"You're the likeliest I've seen. You speak gentler than they do, for the most part, about here—more like a Londoner. Her ladyship wants something genteel, and she's in a hurry to get suited. Here's the address. It's the large house with a lodge and iron gates at the end of this street. You'd best apply at once."

"Thank you. I will."

"And I wish her joy of the place, poor young woman, if she gets it! She's rare hard to please, is my Lady Jakes!" ejaculated Mrs. Toppin as she removed her spectacles, wiped them, and transferred them to their case.

The rain still poured down in torrents, but Margaret Johnson walked on regardless of the storm. She had no difficulty in finding the lodge and iron gates. But when the door of the large house was opened by a smart footman, she felt not a little nervous as she explained her errand. In a few moments she was shown into a room, the amber and gilt furniture of which looked all the more gaudy when contrasted with the lady sitting there—a lady dressed in the deepest and most expensive of widow's weeds. She was a little woman of florid complexion, with light blue eyes, bright and vivacious in manner and looking younger than her thirty years. Despite her sombre crape she wore many diamond rings which glittered on the fingers of her small white hands, and the white lisse arrangement on the top of her fuzzy light hair was secured there by diamond pins.

"A young person after the place, my lady," announced the footman.

"Where have you lived?" was the first question of Lady Jakes, when the door was closed.

Margaret proffered the letter Mrs. Toppin had read. The lady ran her glance quickly over it.

"Canon Bywell?" she said, as she gave it back. "Oh, what a canon says—especially a canon of D——*must* be true! My last maid left me because she didn't seem to know her things from mine. She wasn't *honest*. At all events, I can have no fears on that score respecting *you* with such a character as this. But can you dress hair? Can you sew well? Keep my wardrobe in repair? Make and alter

my morning dresses? In fact do all that a *lady's* lady's maid should do?"

"To the best of my belief, madam, I can do all this."

"You must always say 'my lady' when you speak to me."

"Yes, . . . my lady."

"Put back your hood, take off your hat, and let me have a look at you."

The girl obeyed. Lady Jakes, looking scrutinizingly at the sweet face blushing beneath her bold inspection, remarked that the large grey eyes met hers without flinching, and that the classically-shaped head, round which the smooth brown hair was simply coiled, carried itself as proudly as a queen's.

"You'll do," said the lady shortly with a nod. "I engage you for a month on trial at twenty pounds a year. As this is Saturday and I am terribly in want of a maid, you had best remain. I will send for your things, wherever they may be, to-night."

Preliminaries being thus quickly settled, Margaret Johnson turned over a fresh page in her history and began her new life in the character of a lady's maid.

Lady Jakes was the daughter of a rich country brewer. A year before this story opens she married an old city knight, whom good living in general and port wine in particular killed a few months after marriage. During the prescribed period of her mourning, Lady Jakes elected to live in the house left her by her father—the large stone house with the lodge and iron gates in the county town where she was born. She brought a large retinue from London—among them the dishonest lady's maid, whose place she hoped now she had efficiently supplied.

The new maid, however, had not been many days in Lady Jakes's service before it became painfully evident to the latter that there was more of the lady about Margaret Johnson than about Lady Jakes herself. This knowledge gave rise to an uncomfortable feeling which her ladyship in vain tried to dispel. At first she resented the fact, but ultimately determined to turn it to account. It is true the country brewer's daughter had received a fair enough education at a large school, but it was somewhat humiliating to find that the daily companionship of a refined girl like Margaret Johnson opened out a new branch of learning. It showed her her own deficiencies. She knew herself to be loud, abrupt in speech, quick and gauche in manner. Her maid, on the other hand, spoke slowly, softly, with few words; but those she used were spoken in a low, sweet, melodious voice. Her movements were the embodiment of grace. Her dresses—rigorously plain—were of some soft black stuff that clung closely to her figure, with the narrowest rim of white at throat and wrists. She was in mourning for her father, who had died a few months back, she said; but on all matters referring to herself or her antecedents the girl was reticent in the extreme.

Lady Jakes loved to have her hair brushed. She was a vivacious little woman, and excitable; perhaps the action soothed her. She would sit by the hour before her toilet glass in an elaborately-trimmed peignoir, while Margaret stood brushing with slow monotony the thick, rather coarse, light hair, which afterwards had to be plaited and curled and frizzed.

One day, little more than a month after Margaret's arrival, mistress and maid were thus engaged, when the former said abruptly:

"You wear no ornaments, Johnson."

"No, my lady."

"Many mistresses forbid their servants to wear jewellery, but that can't be your reason for wearing none. What is it?"

"I do not think jewellery suitable with deep mourning, my lady."

"But I am in the deepest mourning, and I wear these." And Lady Jakes, holding up both her little white hands, smiled as she saw the diamonds flash.

"It is a matter of feeling, I suppose, my lady."

"Do you think it bad taste—in plain English, *vulgar* to wear these splendid rings?"

"If I am bound to answer, I think it is scarcely in *good* taste, my lady."

The lady laughed a little scoffingly. Her ruddy cheeks grew ruddier. She bit her under lip.

"You're a strange girl, Johnson," she remarked presently, "and you know a good deal more than I would credit most maids with knowing, who haven't been out before. How you got your ideas of refinement puzzles me, but you *have* got them. I've a good mind to put down my jewellery till I begin my second mourning. And—I like those plain black gowns you wear. There is certainly a style about them, and the way you do your hair."

"I wish I could catch a little of that girl's manner," she thought as she watched her in the glass. "I wish I were as tall and slim as she is! What pretty hands she has—as white almost as mine—but they are not so small. . . . No. I am quite sure her hands are not so small as mine . . ."

From that day Lady Jakes laid by her rings, her thick gold chain. She ceased to friz and curl her hair. The small white lisse arrangement rested securely on her head without the aid of diamond pins. She lowered her voice in speaking—when she could recollect. She moved about more slowly—when she had time. To her servants it was no secret that Lady Jakes was copying her maid. They looked on as at an amusing comedy, and smiled.

It was "assize week" at Mudworth, a time of great importance in that old county town. To obtain a seat in court—to gaze for a few hours at the judge, the barristers, the jury, and the prisoners—was a species of mild dissipation in which Lady Jakes thought she might indulge, notwithstanding her recent widowhood. Accordingly she went.

On her return—it was almost her dinner hour, and Margaret was assisting at her toilette—she said: "I met with quite an adventure to-day, Johnson! The heat was so dreadful in that close, stuffy gallery, I nearly fainted. I had to have water and smelling salts brought to me, and at last was obliged to be assisted downstairs. One of the barristers, in his wig and gown—such a handsome fellow, I had noticed him before—happened to be standing at the bottom of the stairs, and ordered me to be taken into a nice cool room. He was so polite that when I came round I inquired his name. He said it was Charles Bywell. 'Related to Canon Bywell?' I asked, and he told me he was his nephew and only living relative. I expect to see something more of Mr. Bywell," she added, smiling significantly, as she looked at herself in the glass, "and then, no doubt, I shall have some news for you concerning your old patron, Johnson."

Had her ladyship been less occupied with her toilette and her own thoughts, she might have remarked the deep blush, succeeded by a deathly palor on the face of her usually calm attendant. Twice Margaret attempted to speak, but voice failed her. At last, as steadily as she could, she said: "Will you do me the very great favour of not mentioning my name to . . . Mr. Bywell, my lady?"

"You are too late, Johnson, for I have already mentioned it. I told him it was owing to the very excellent character written by his uncle, the Canon, that I had obtained my present maid. He looked anything but pleased, and muttered something below his breath not complimentary to the Canon. There was no time then to question him, however. Give me my fan. Dear, dear, how warm it is. And, how pale you look, Johnson! I suppose it is the heat that is affecting everybody."

The following morning Lady Jakes decided again to attend the court. At the last moment before setting off she felt an irresistible desire to wear her diamond rings. Accordingly, she took them from the drawer, where they had lain for the last few weeks, and placed them on her fingers. One, however, was missing; in vain she turned over all the contents of the drawer; it was not there. She charged Margaret to find it, and restore it to her on her return.

Her ladyship came from the court late and in the worst of tempers. The heat had been excessive, the cases tried uninteresting, and her handsome barrister acquaintance of the day before had simply bowed to her as she passed him, whereas she expected he would have spoken at least, if not escorted her to her carriage. Altogether it had been a day of disappointments.

"Where is my ring?" were her first words to Margaret.

"I am sorry I cannot find it," replied the girl. "I have searched for it from the time you left till now."

"Not found it? Then it is the old story!" cried Lady Jakes impetuously. "I have been robbed! It is most abominable that servants should be so dishonest. My last maid was a convicted thief, and now——"

"Do you suspect me, Lady Jakes?" asked Margaret, speaking very quietly but raising her head proudly, as with a straight and level glance she looked full at her mistress.

"Don't be ridiculous, Johnson. You know I do not. Canon Bywell's letter was sufficient to prevent that. But I'm determined to find the thief, though, and to have my ring back. Send for a policeman, Johnson."

"Excuse me, my lady. That is scarcely my province."

Her ladyship was furious. "Desire Symmonds to come to me," she said. Symmonds was the footman; and, little anticipating what was to ensue, ten minutes later he brought a police officer to the house.

"Now call all the servants and come with them here," said Lady Jakes, who in her excitement had gone out into the hall. "Policeman," she began, as the astonished domestics, male and female, came hurrying forward, "policeman, a valuable diamond ring is missing and must be found. I am certain it is in this house. I suspect no one in particular, mind, but, my servants' drawers and boxes must be searched at once. *All* except my maid's. She, I know, is honest."

A babel of indignant protestations here arose, which was only quieted by Margaret coming forward and saying in her clear low tones: "If Lady Jakes orders her servants to be subjected to this indignity, they can but submit; the readier all are to assist this man in his unpleasant office the quicker it will be over. My room shall be searched with the rest."

So saying, she placed her hand gently on the shoulder of a young housemaid who was sobbing bitterly. Her words—above all, her gentle warmth of manner—went straight to the hearts of those very men and women who thus far had looked at her askance, if not with hatred. Now, each one seemed more impatient than the rest to have his and her possessions searched. The proceedings probably would have lasted far into the night, but for one simple incident.

"Pass that—it's the lady's maid's room—and come to mine," cried the young girl eagerly whom Margaret had befriended. But the functionary of the law stood still. He had an eye to business, and did not care to go over the same ground twice. "We'll take them as they come," he replied, and turned into Margaret's room.

A detailed account of the search here would be needless. It was of short duration.

Lady Jakes, who had retired to the drawing-room, awaiting the result, was soon apprised of it. A knock at the door, permission to enter given, and the policeman and Margaret Johnson appeared upon the threshold. Margaret, pale as death, fixed her large earnest eyes on her mistress's; there was a pleading, pitiful expression in them, but no appearance of guilt or shame.

"The ring was found in this young woman's box, my lady; she says she's innocent," announced the policeman.

"Found in Johnson's box? Is it *possible?*"

The man smiled slightly, and, with a hasty glance at the accused and at the door—as though a little doubtful about its being safe to let go his hold—he stepped cautiously across the floor to Lady Jakes and laid the missing ring upon the table by her side.

"Oh, Johnson! This is too bad!" she cried. "Haven't I trusted you in every way? Haven't I treated you more as a friend than a servant? If you had asked me for the ring I might have given it to you. Oh, it is infamous that I should have been so deceived! And Canon Bywell gave you such a character, too! Have you *nothing* to say for yourself? Can't you speak, girl?"

The great tears stood in Margaret's eyes, but did not fall. She looked piteously from her mistress to the flushed and excited faces of the servants who had followed.

"I have nothing to say, except that I am innocent. I did not put it there," she faltered.

"Innocent!" sneered the policeman, "the ring was hidden in the finger of a glove. On the top of her locked box, my lady, was lying this pair of gloves. I might just have tossed them on one side, but, thinks I, they're smart gloves now for a lady's maid, and handled them almost by chance. Inside the finger of one of them I found this ring. Queer hiding-place and clever."

As he spoke he pushed the ring into the third finger of the right hand glove, in illustration of his words. "Am I to take away the young woman on the charge?"

But the poor girl heard no more; she had fainted.

"No, no, I won't turn her away to-night," answered Lady Jakes, whose anger was fast abating. "Carry her up to her room, some of you. She can stay till morning. Leave the gloves, policeman, and if you look in at breakfast-time to-morrow I will tell you what I have decided to do."

No sooner had Margaret been conveyed insensible to her room, than Mr. Bywell was announced. Now Lady Jakes had looked forward to receiving the handsome barrister—should he call—in a calm, even stately fashion; but the painful occurrence that had just transpired effectually effaced all such intentions. After apologising for making so late a call, explaining briefly that he had been detained in court, he said: "I was most anxious to see you on a private matter of my own. Indeed, I find myself in a position of such difficulty that I am in a measure bound to take you into my confidence. Margaret Johnson——"

"Oh, Mr. Bywell!" she interrupted eagerly, "have you come to speak to me about that wretched girl? Whatever it is, it can scarcely be worse than I already know. How infamously she has deceived us all!"

"Pardon me. I do not understand you in the least."

"No? I thought of course it was something about her character

you had come to tell me. Well, then, it is for me to impart a confidence to you. After all your uncle, the Canon, said of her, after all the kindness and consideration I have shown her,—would you believe it? she has turned out to be—a thief!"

"No. I would *not* believe it!" the young barrister said sternly, while his face turned pale with passion, and his eyes gleamed ominously. Lady Jakes moved a little uneasily on her chair.

"Of course it has distressed me terribly," she continued, "for I have made quite a companion—a friend—of Johnson. But when I missed my most valuable diamond ring to-day, sent for a policeman, had my servants' boxes searched, and the ring was discovered in *her* box—why then you see there could be no question of her guilt."

Mr. Bywell rose from his seat. The hand resting on the table shook, but his voice was steady as he asked with studied calmness: "You sent for a policeman? Suspected *her*? Had *her* things searched?"

"No, no. You do not understand. I did not suspect her. I told the man to search the other servants' boxes, not hers. But she insisted. It was her own fault she was found out. I suppose she thought in such a hiding-place the ring would not be discovered."

"What-hiding place?"

"The finger of a glove. Clever idea, was it not? The policeman himself said so, and but for the fact that he was struck with the smartness of the gloves, he says it might never have been discovered."

"Good heavens! Where is she now?"

"Oh, she is in her own room. She fainted dead off when she saw the case was so strong against her. I told the policeman I would not turn her out to-night. He is to call in the morning. In the mean time I shall have decided what I am to do."

While Lady Jakes was speaking, her hearer resumed his seat. He appeared to have been extraordinarily affected, she thought, by her disclosure; but now he recovered his self-possession and looked quietly thoughtful, as though he were going over in his mind all she had told him. She wondered if she had told it well?

"That is the ring, those are the gloves," she observed presently, handing both across the table.

Pushing the ring from him with a little scornful gesture, he took up the gloves, and, passing his hand across his forehead, fell to gazing at then with the greatest intentness. It almost seemed that he appealed to them mutely for a revelation of the truth, and that he waited expecting it might come to him. His next proceeding was to examine them closely.

They were a pair of long, tan-coloured Suède gloves, of the make known as mousquetaires, and new. He noticed that the right hand glove only had been tried on. He placed the ring in the third finger. Lady Jakes began to find the silence irksome.

Presently he looked up. The expression of his face had so com-

pletely changed that it startled her. "I should like to make a little bet with you," he said playfully. "A dozen pair of those pretty gloves to one that the accused is innocent—and that you shall prove her so."

"*I* prove her innocent, when I know so well she is not?"

"I take eight and a quarter, Lady Jakes; your size is —— let me see ——. Ah! these gloves will be guide sufficient. They will exactly fit you."

"No. Those are a quarter of a size too large."

"Indeed? Still they look small enough. I dare say the numbers are not always to be relied on. Irrespective of figures, I believe these gloves will fit you."

"How persistent you are, Mr. Bywell! I tell you they are too large."

"But, seriously, you cannot be sure without ——"

"Trying them on? Well, suppose I *have* tried them on?"

"You, Lady Jakes? Impossible!"

"Yes, I have. And as you seem so much surprised, I'll tell you how it happened. One day I went into my maid's room and saw her box open. It contained her coloured things which she is not wearing. On the top of them lay a lovely pair of long Suède gloves. One doesn't expect one's servants, you know, to wear such gloves as these. Tan-coloured Suède mousquetaires had just come into fashion when my poor husband died, so I have never been able to wear a pair."

"And you tried on this glove—just to see how tan mousquetaires would suit you?" he inquired, with an eagerness he could not repress.

"I did; for that reason partly. And for another. I thought my hand was less than Johnson's; and it is."

"Try this on now, dear Lady Jakes. To oblige me. Do!"

Laughing and blushing, she complied, scarcely noticing that he slipped the ring upon her finger first.

The glove was too large, as she had said. He appeared about to button it, and leaned over her for that purpose, when, suddenly, looking towards the door: "Quick! Take it off!" he cried, as though fearful of some one appearing on the scene.

It was a false alarm, but one that answered his purpose better almost than he had dared to hope.

The glove was pulled off with all the haste he could desire. Mr. Bywell pointed to her hand.

"Where on earth is my ring?" she asked.

Without speaking, he turned it out of the third finger of the glove.

But this was not enough for Mr. Bywell. He waited for the lady to say something more.

"It is the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of!" she exclaimed, flushed and breathless with excitement. "It is exactly

what must have happened when I tried on that glove in my maid's room. I remember pulling it off in just such haste, thinking I heard somebody coming and not wishing to be caught. The ring was always a little large for me. It must have remained in the glove finger and I never missed it until to-day; though I firmly believed I had put it away with my other rings. So Margaret Johnson is innocent after all!"

"Thank you, Lady Jakes. I have won my wager," he said, quietly, with a look of intense satisfaction. "And now I must request you to send for—Miss Johnson. The communication I had to make to you must be made in her presence."

While Lady Jakes sent for her maid, Mr. Bywell paced up and down the room, his eyes fixed on the carpet, his lips compressed, and his appearance generally betokening that he neither desired to speak nor to be spoken to.

At last the door opened, and Margaret—very pale, and evidently suffering acutely—entered. When, however, she perceived who was with Lady Jakes her face became suffused with blushes; she drew back as though about to leave the room. In a moment Mr. Bywell was at her side.

"Courage, my dear!" he whispered. Then aloud, and taking her hand in his: "Lady Jakes, I came here this evening to claim my promised bride. My uncle—on whom from boyhood I have been dependent—refused to acknowledge me as his heir if I married my old tutor's daughter. This dear girl wrote me a brief note bidding me farewell; and rather than blight, as she supposed, my worldly prospects, she left her native place, and, being poor, sought a situation, believing thus to raise an insurmountable barrier between us. This was at my uncle's instigation and by his help. His opposition now is ended."

He paused. Margaret raised her eyes to his wonderingly—the look of love and joy that shone in them she could not hide. "Your uncle at last consents?" she asked.

"I had news this morning of his death," was the reply.

Lady Jakes, enchanted with this dénouement, kissed Margaret impulsively, forcing her into a chair beside her while she recounted with genuine feeling how the mistake about the ring had occurred.

"I shall never like tan Suède mousquetaires again!" she added, with a sigh that was almost a sob.

"Pray do not blame those gloves," said Mr. Bywell, smiling. "I gave them to Margaret. The accident might have happened with any other kind."

There remains nothing more to add, except that Margaret Johnson was shortly afterwards married to Mr. Bywell; that Lady Jakes, discarding her mourning, was present at the wedding; and that this story is a true one.

E. M. Davy.

IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.

When over youth's receding track
The moonlight of remembrance throws
A tender charm, half winning back
The sunshine that too quickly goes:
How oft in retrospection cast,
Untrammelled fancy floats between
The actual story of the past,
And what that story might have been.
But simple words to breathe so much
Of soft regret or sorrow keen,
In truth there are not many touch
More hearts than these—It might have been!

Alone and loveless, year by year,
Our lives are lived, our ways are planned;
Young love himself once hovered near,
To wait awhile a beckoning hand.
When wistfully the urchin smiled,
We passed him by with look serene,
Though now, I warrant, thought beguiled
We sometimes say—It might have been!
Oh, simple words that breathe so much
Of soft regret or sorrow keen,
Where is the heart ye cannot touch,
Oft echoed sigh—It might have been?

We saw the victor's laurel wave,
But never proud success have known;
Alack, her glowing mead she gave
To other efforts than our own.
'Twas not for us to taste her bliss,
Who only prove what failures mean;
Yet conscience whispers—but for this,
Or but for that—It might have been!
Where is the heart they cannot touch
With soft regret or sorrow keen?
To you, to me they breathe so much,
Those simple words—It might have been!

Here was the glittering plaything prized,
Whose worthlessness we saw too late;
And there the single chance despised,
Which opened up a fairer fate.
Ah, well-a-day! we know not what
Of danger lurked within the scene,
And haply it were wiser not
To dream of all that might have been.
And yet our inmost hearts they touch
With soft regret or sorrow keen,
Those simple words which mean so much,
That frequent sigh—It might have been!

SYDNEY GREY.

M. ELLEN STAPLES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

ON MARIA'S EAR THERE FELL IN A LOW WHISPER, ONE SINGLE WORD:
"BEWARE!"

THE ARGOSY.

MARCH, 1885.

THE MYSTERY OF ALLAN GRALE.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GENERAL'S SPADE-GUINEA.

IT is one of the terrible experiences of life, when, our whole nature being strung up to receive and endure a shock from one direction, a sharp and ringing blow falls upon us from quite another quarter.

Whatever Maria Vivian had been expecting, on that sweet slumbrous afternoon at Dering Court, it was certainly not that carefully driven chaise, slowly advancing up the avenue, with the led horse behind it. She knew at once that some sudden evil had befallen her uncle, the General. She recognised the man who was driving the chaise. It was Webster, their ex-footman, who had married a former maid of her own, and was landlord of that hostel, the Knight's Arms, at which she had thought it likely her uncle would take lunch.

"O, Webster!" cried Maria, with white lips, as she ran out, and the man touched his hat to her. She could only stand aside with clasped hands on the great flight of steps, while the servants lifted out the unconscious form of the master of the house, and bore him gently into it.

"The General lunched at our inn, Miss Maria" Webster said, "and my wife would have it there was something coming over him then. She told me so when he went away. But I thought it was only her fancies. About an hour after that, a lad came running to say he was lying on the Dering Road, insensible. And off we set at once, and there he was. We didn't lose any time, Miss Maria."

"I'm sure you would not, Webster," she said, with the gracious sweetness that was natural to her.

Dr. Palmer had been sent for, and in the meantime, Mrs. Vivian and her experienced female servants did their best for the sick man's comfort and well-being. Only they could not restore him to consciousness. He lay with half-closed eyes, moaning heavily.

Whatever she felt, Mrs. Vivian refused to show any alarm. "Men of the General's age often have these seizures," she observed to Maria. "He must never ride alone again. And let George be telegraphed for at once. When your uncle revives he is sure to ask for him."

Edgar undertook this duty. He could not be thankful enough that he had not worried his uncle with his own difficulties. Yet those difficulties were imminent. His one hope lay in Allan Grale's fulfilment of his promise of aid. As he went by the lodge of the Court on his way to the telegraph office, he paused to direct that if Mr. Allan Grale or any messenger from him should appear on the scene during his absence, he should be requested to await his return.

Poor Maria found herself quite at a discount in the sick room. There was nothing she could do. She could only sit still, and gaze mistily at the toilet table, on which some attendant had laid the watch and chain that had been removed from the General's prostrate form.

There was the little gold pencil case, for which she had saved up her youthful shillings, proud of the dainty gift she had at last laid in her uncle's hand. But something suddenly aroused Maria's attention.

The watch-chain had attached to it a large gold ring, over which was slipped the smaller rings of several little ornaments. One of these smaller rings now hung twisted and vacant. Its appendage had clearly been wrenched from it!

Maria took up the chain and eagerly examined it. What was missing? There was her childish gift, the pencil case; there was the familiar locket containing his wife's portrait, and the hair of their one baby who had died in early infancy; there was the General's much-valued compass; there was a small seal. What was missing was a spade guinea. About this spade guinea there hung a little tale.

During a brief visit to London made by the Vivian family many years before, George Vivian had picked this coin from the grass in one of the parks. He was quite a little lad, and thinking it to be a pretty gew gaw, he had played with it for a whole day before it was observed and its value noted. It was duly advertised. But though three or four claimants responded, none of them could give an accurate description, and one or two of undoubted character, to whom it was shown, distinctly disclaimed it. So George retained possession of it, and on his uncle's next birthday, when his brother and sister were ready with their little offerings, he bethought him of this, and got up quite a pretty speech about rendering "treasure trove" to the lord of the manor. The General had been delighted. Somehow, the whole thing had seemed to him like a good omen, and he had often since adverted to it. Mrs. Vivian had said that it appeared to her more like a sign that Nephew George would get a good character for generosity at very little cost to himself.

And now, how had this spade guinea got lost? Had it happened

by accident in her uncle's fall? Or had it been wrenched from him while he lay insensible?

How vexed the General would be about it! And, in connexion with his old happy superstition concerning it, she could not suppress a feeling of uneasiness in herself. Its loss (just now, too,) seemed like an evil omen for George.

That is the worst of accepting auspicious signs. Their reverse is forced upon us. It is few who have the happy philosophy to accept those, and yet resolutely ignore these.

Was it not possible that it might be recovered? Surely it might be lying in the road where the General had fallen, and possibly it was trampled down by the feet of those who had come to his succour. Maria had desired Webster not to leave the Court: she could ascertain from him the exact spot where the accident had taken place.

As she went downstairs, she had a curious fancy, which is a common enough experience with those who are in an exalted nervous state. It seemed to her as if she had lived through all this before—even down to this little detail of the missing pendant—and that nothing but a curious cloud on her memory prevented her from recovering the whole course of events, and knowing what would have to happen next. Surely she must have dreamed of this last night! Yes, yes, she had. For one instant, it almost seemed as if she had it all in her grasp, but it was only as one might see a wide expanse of country revealed by a flash of lightning; another second, and all was obscurity.

Webster was standing where she had left him—on the terrace outside, near his horse and chaise. Maria put her question.

"Midway on the road between this and the 'Knight's Arms,' ma'am," he answered promptly. "Rather nearer this than that."

"But can you tell exactly whereabouts it was?" she inquired again. "Did not you notice the precise spot?"

Webster looked at her a little wonderingly. "Well, miss," he said, "I was so taken up with the sight of my poor master, that I can't say I noticed just exactly. He was lying on that bit of road at the back of the trees of the Dark Pool."

Maria was silent. Yes, it was so! Directly she heard it, she felt she had known this, too, before. The Dark Pool had been in her last night's dream. But also, there had been something more about the Pool than this, and what that something was still escaped her.

"It's a very quiet part of the road, that, Miss Maria. No houses near. My wife always says she feels a kind of shiver in going along it; as if something bad had happened there once, or is to happen there, someday. It was a kind of providence that a stranger was coming along just there and saw the General, for he sent us word, if he did no more."

"What stranger?" asked Maria.

Webster shook his head. "I can't tell you, ma'am. It was little

Joe Ward who brought the news to us. Joe said a strange gentleman had met him in the road, who told him General Vivian was lying in a fit a little further on, and bade him run to the 'Knight's Arms' for help. We made sure this gentleman had gone back to the General, and that we'd find him with him when we got there; but there was no sign of him. It seemed queer."

"Perhaps he had gone off in another direction for more help," suggested Maria, "or was pressed for time and could not wait. A stranger, did the boy say?"

"That's what Joe called him, 'a strange gentleman.' But he could hardly have been quite a stranger, or how would he have known the General's name, and the sign of the Knight's Arms?"

Maria hesitated whether to tell Webster about the missing pendant, but she decided that she would not for the present. Webster was a worthy man, but sensitive and easily offended, and there was no knowing how he might take it.

Most likely it would be found on the spot, trodden down into the ground, so as not to be conspicuous to any casual observer. There were no thieves likely to be lurking in sweet Dering lanes, and the ornaments which remained safe were worth much more than the lost trifle. She herself would take an early opportunity of going to the place, and quietly searching for it. It actually seemed to her that in that elusive dream, after which her memory vainly grasped, there was something lost, which was found again when it seemed least likely, and that both the loss and the finding were in someway connected with the Dark Pool.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. GRALE'S BASKET.

THAT day things had been going on more happily than usual at Moorland House. Poor Mrs. Grale's world was ever brighter when her son was at home. Allan might not be always very dutifully attentive, but he always spoke kindly to his mother; he never jarred her nerves as his father did, or snubbed her after Mary Anne's fashion. And now he really seemed to have returned from this holiday at his very best. She was sure that his father would be gratified by Allan's early attendance on business that morning (she knew nothing of the trouble at the works), and much as she longed for a chat with her boy, she noted with pleasure that he did not return home till the luncheon hour. Possibly it was this new devotion to duty which made Allan, during that meal, rather more silent and pre-occupied than was his wont. But when it was over he showed no signs of hurrying back. Mary Anne went away to pursue some of her own devices, and Mrs. Grale pulled her knitting from her work-bag, and, with her son lingering beside her, felt herself a happy woman.

"And so you found your way to Savoch, Alny," she said, calling him by the pet name she had given him when an infant. "I did not ask you about it when you mentioned it, for your father was present, and it might have put him out. I really don't think he noticed what you said. It's hard that he should feel as he does about my poor sister and her husband. Whatever disgrace has fallen, it is not their fault; and it doesn't touch us; it's nothing to your father or me. Why can't he let bygones be bygones? I suppose there is nothing fresh, is there, Alny?"

"Nothing fresh at Savoch," he replied. The remembrance of the house there, and the life lived in it, rose upon his mind like a vision, not of sleeping beauty and hope, but of sleeping anguish and shame. His face was very grave.

"And how is my sister Marget looking?" asked Mrs. Grale again.

"Pretty well for her, I think," said Allan, hesitatingly. "She seemed in good health. But her days must be very dull, mother, with no companion but that grim husband of hers."

"Ah, she knows what made him grim," answered Mrs. Grale, feelingly. "They've both had the same burden to bear, Alny, and indeed that's the only comfort they've had. I suppose she had no news to tell you, my dear?"

"Nothing at all: it isn't likely," he replied. There was a strange constraint in his manner.

"Was the name not even mentioned?" Mrs. Grale asked again, in a lower voice.

"Not once," replied Allan, briefly. His aunt's worn, craving face, rose before him, with those questioning eyes to which he had refused response. It hurt Allan to remember this. He could realise what an event his visit must have been in the Savoch house, what wild hopes and wishes it must have awakened, and to the disappointment they had been doomed. And yet—what could he have said?

Mrs. Grale shook her head sadly. "I'll engage it was not out of your Aunt Marget's thoughts for one minute," she remarked. "Well, we all have our trials—but oh, Alny, hers has been a heavy one."

He bent his head in sympathy.

And the never knowing when the worst may have to be gone over again must be the bitterest bit of all," went on Mrs. Grale. "One can live through anything if it's to come to an end. There's no safe cupboard for family skeletons except the one with the green door, and the stone in front of it. And perhaps poor Marget's misery is over; only as she does not know it, it is the same to her as if it were not. There was a story about a death once, you know, Alny, but proofs could never be had. She wouldn't believe it without them."

"Ah, she would not want to believe it! she'd rather there might be another chance, cost her what it might," said Allan. There was a quiver of emotion in his voice, which made his mother look up from her work, and her heart warmed the more to her son for showing so

much fellow-feeling on a certain family trouble which she never dared even to mention to Mr. Grale or Mary Anne.

"Well,—well,—well," she sighed. "Poor Marget and I haven't shared life fairly between us. She has had all the hard work and hard fare, and one name on a grave, and one name that isn't anywhere! And yet she was always the best of us two sisters, though not counted the best looking; and Mr. Gibson was known to be so good and clever when she married him, a man sure to get on. But he did not. And there's me with a carriage of my own, and children that I may well be proud of."

Allan sprang rather suddenly from his seat near his mother, crossed the room, and stood looking out of the window.

"I've got nothing more to wish for, my dear, except to see you and Mary Anne both well married," pursued Mrs. Grale, after wiping a tear from her eye. "And there was a time when I thought you and Miss Vivian quite understood each other, Alny. But perhaps it's as well it wasn't so, if Mr. George Vivian is looking Mary Anne's way, which seems likely. For I don't believe in families being too much muddled up together."

A brief silence ensued. Then Allan spoke with a change of voice, and an entire change of subject. "Mother, how is old Nurse Kate?"

This was an ancient servant of the Grale family, now living in a cottage situated between Moorland Hall and Dering Court. She was not a pensioner on the Grales, having savings of her own, but Mrs. Grale was in the habit of showing her many little attentions.

"Why; what put her into your head?" asked Mrs. Grale, thinking that this dear son of hers was indeed growing very considerate. "O, Nurse Kate is quite well. I haven't been to her cottage since we came from the country—but she was up here the other day."

"Well, as I should enjoy a stroll this lovely afternoon," said Allan, "I think I'll go to see her."

"You'll make her a proud and happy woman, if you do, Alny. You were always her favourite."

"But I must take her something," he said.

"Take her anything you like, dear," rejoined his mother. "I promised her some cuttings for her garden. You can get them from the gardener. But don't take them: tell her you are sending them."

"No, I'll take them myself," returned Allan. "Politeness of that kind is the best part of a gift." He hated himself as he said this, knowing there was double-dealing in his own mind.

"Well, you can take your choice of the hampers you'll find in the store closet," said Mrs. Grale. "I've got in some new ones, and I have had 'G' painted on them, so that when I send them about I may be sure of getting my own new ones returned, instead of other people's old ones. I think you'll find one or two small enough."

"I won't take a very small one," said Allan. "I must take the old lady a bouncing gift: and young Grale of Moorland Hall and the

Works can't compromise his dignity by carrying a hamper," he added laughingly. "That's the sort of thing peers do, to prove their undoubted superiority to conventional public opinion."

Mrs. Grale smiled. She liked a speech of this kind. It opened possibilities for her own free and easy ways among her bran-new grandeur. But the fear of Mary Anne was always before her eyes.

"Well, do as you like, Alny. You needn't bring the hamper back. There would be nothing polite in that. Tell nurse to return it at her own convenience."

Allan's movements in arranging this little gift for the old servant might be regarded as somewhat peculiar. First, he went to the store-closet, and sought among the hampers for something which he did not find; one of the older hampers, not impressed with this brand of 'G.' But there was none. His choice fell on a hamper which seemed rather strong and large for the carrying of mere cuttings. It had a lid, and its handle was fixed in the middle of this lid. Next Allan went to the greenhouse, and made a careless and not very liberal selection of flowers and roots. He dropped these into the hamper, and then, instead of starting straightway for his walk, he carried the hamper upstairs to his own room, spread a newspaper on the floor, and emptied its contents thereon. Next he unlocked his wardrobe and took from one of its shelves a box of Oriental workmanship. This he deposited carefully at the bottom of the basket, which he then filled up again with his flowery spoil, and left the house. Glancing at the parlour window, he saw his mother watching him. She smiled and nodded pleasantly, thinking to herself that he was a son of whom any mother might well be—oh, so proud!

Between Moorland Hall and Nurse Kate's cottage, Allan passed only two or three rustic children. He found Nurse Kate full of the disaster which had befallen General Vivian, word of which had reached her just before Allan's arrival. This was the first Allan had heard of the General's illness, and it rather staggered him. Had poor Edgar's unlucky position somehow leaked out, and thus upset the old man?

"If you've been so good as to bring me all the pretty flowers with your very own hands," said the grateful old nurse, "at any rate, you shan't drag back that basket, Master Allan. Leave it with me. Its weight, when it's empty, will be nothing even to a poor old body like I am getting."

"Then it must be still more trifling for a strong young body like me," returned Allan.

He did not say that the basket was not yet empty, that it had another cargo to unload, not there, but at Dering Court. He knew that curiosity was one of the old dame's paramount qualities, and that what she was not fully told, she would certainly set herself to find out. It struck her as a curious thing that Allan should persist in carrying away the basket; she was shrewd enough to feel that he must have some reason for it, and she was on the alert at once

As Allan wished her good-bye, and left the cottage by the front door, she whisked out at the back one. By standing on a bench in a nook of the garden, she commanded full view of the road and of Allan.

"He is not going home," she muttered to herself. "He is going the other way. He has something in that basket, and I wonder what it is. Not cuttings for somebody else, or he'd have said so. Now what is it that he's after? I'd like to know. But well—there—young gentlemen will be young gentlemen, and he was my own darling nursling. Bless him!"

As Allan was pursuing his way towards Dering Court, he saw Edgar Vivian hastening on, far ahead of him. Edgar was on his return from despatching the telegram to George, recalling him to the Court. He hurried after him as fast as possible, and gained on him at last, especially when Edgar paused at the Lodge to inquire if anything had been seen of young Mr. Grale. Edgar had not gone many yards up the avenue before he heard the clang of the gate, and turning, saw that the eagerly expected visitor had arrived.

He stood still; Allan came on swiftly; and they turned aside from the path, where their interview might be interrupted, and halted together among the trees.

"So you have come yourself, Grale," said Edgar, "and oh! you can't think how glad I am to see you! My uncle has had some sort of fit while he was out riding, and is lying unconscious."

"I am very sorry. Have just heard of it as I came along."

"Look here, Grale, I can never be too thankful that I had not been bothering him about my affairs."

"I won't linger here to hinder you at such a time, old friend. See, I have managed your little business," added Allan, as he took from his pocket a sealed envelope. "I could not have delivered that to anybody but yourself, Edgar. There's a fifty-pound note inside. I thought you might like that better than a cheque."

"How good of you!" exclaimed Edgar Vivian, gratefully. "But I'll not begin to thank you now. Without this help what should I have done? There would have been no hope anywhere."

"And this is the box you promised to keep for me," continued Allan, opening the basket, and waving off thanks by his own matter-of-fact manner. "I thought I'd better bring that up myself too. It is such an awkward thing to carry that I put it into this basket, which has the advantage of a handle."

Edgar took it into his hands—an Oriental box, coloured black, with straggling yellow devices over it. There was a faint perfume about it. Often in after days, when mystery and trouble had set in, did Edgar Vivian seem to catch a waft of that soft, indefinite odour.

"I won't detain you one moment longer," said Allan, who indeed seemed in nervous haste. "You will not find it very troublesome to just stow that away in some safe place at once, will you?" he inquired, with some solicitude.

"I'll go straight to the house and do so instantly," answered Edgar, who was holding the box in his hands. It was not at all heavy. "Don't trouble yourself about the hamper. Leave it where it lies, and as you go past the gate-house, tell the lodge-keeper to send his boy for it, and to see that it goes back to Moorland Hall. But need you go off at once?" he added hastily, suddenly recalling his sister's expressed wish to see Allan when he came, though she might not care to see him in the general distress. "Won't you come up to the house, and hear what the Doctor says? A friend's face will reassure poor Maria."

"No, no," dissented Allan Grale quickly, whether to the general invitation or to the last particular assertion it was hard to say. "I'll not come in now—I'll send up to inquire in the evening, and I hope all will be fairly well by then."

Edgar shook his head doubtfully.

"Anything more about young Carr?" he asked.

"Not that I know of. I have not been to the Works since the morning."

"Wait a moment, Grale. I wish you'd come in. Maria was saying that she had not seen you for a long time."

Allan's face flushed.

"When did she say that?" he asked in a low voice.

"Only this afternoon—before this happened to my uncle."

"Did you tell her anything about Charlie Carr?" said Allan, who was looking not at Edgar, but another way.

Edgar Vivian felt this question awkward. Perhaps he had been a little rash in his confidences.

"I had to tell her there was something not quite right," he said, "because she wanted to go calling on the Palmers. Was I wrong in saying so much? You may trust Maria to keep a secret, when telling it would be to anybody's disadvantage."

"I know that!" replied Allan, with a strange, flashing fervency. "Well, you need not tell her that box belongs to me, for you remember what I told you this morning—that it might set her thinking of her own letters. And I don't want to have to give them back, or to pain her with any reflection on the subject."

"She shall know nothing about it," Edgar cordially assured him. He took it for granted there had been some lovers' quarrel between this young man and his sister, which time would put straight.

Shaking hands with each other, Allan went off, trailing the hamper behind him, and nodding acquiescence to Edgar's called-out injunction to be sure and leave it with the lodge-keeper. Allan Grale did no such thing. When he was out in the open road, he carried the basket with him for some distance, then threw it over a hedge into a plantation, and leaping over a gate close by, sought about for a very thick growth of bracken, under which he carefully concealed the hamper.

"I'll come for it in a day or two," he said to himself. "It will be easy saying then that I looked in at Nurse Kate's, and finding it still there, brought it away to save the old woman the trouble."

He gave a low bitter laugh as he went on. He knew well enough that nothing but the exaggerated torment and trouble weighing down his own mind could make him see fears on every hand, convert trifling molehills into mountains, and be ready to do or say any earthly thing that might serve as a plea of excuse to disarm suspicion.

He was in the very act of leaping back into the highway, when a gig rattled up, taking Doctor Palmer to the Court. It all happened so quickly that there was no time for salutation, scarcely for recognition. But Dr. Palmer said to the groom, "Why! isn't that young Grale?"

And the groom replied, "Yes, sir, it was."

Edgar Vivian was just descending from stowing Allan's box safely away in his own sanctum, when the doctor arrived at the Court. The invalid had not regained consciousness. As Dr. Palmer bent over him, he suddenly opened his eyes, looked the doctor full in the face, and spoke in a muttered tone:

"Why! isn't that young Grale?"

This echo of almost the last words he himself had used, naturally startled Dr. Palmer. Could there be anything, then, in that theory of thought-reading, which he was rather inclined to ridicule? and was it possible that a mind, made vacant by disease or circumstance, might reflect any idea that flitted before it—just as a blank pane of glass will, under some conditions, serve as a mirror? This was no time for theory, but he stored the fact in his memory.

Mrs. Vivian, not catching his words, asked what they were. The upper servant in attendance replied simply, "No sense at all, ma'am, just wandering." And he had at once relapsed into unconsciousness again.

Edgar followed his old friend from the sick room. "Is the case serious, Doctor?" he questioned.

"There is no immediate danger," was the reply. "I don't think anything need be apprehended for a few days."

"A few days!" echoed Edgar. He had not allowed himself to think of any danger so imminent as that.

Dr. Palmer shook his head. "The General has an unfortunate temperament for this kind of attack," he said. "He is an excitable, irascible man, and the least agitation will suffice to bring on another fit."

They found Webster at his horse's head, preparing to drive back to the Knight's Arms. "Did the General seem at all annoyed when he was at your house this morning?" asked the medical man.

Webster touched his hat. "My wife said he was absent like, troubled, but I noticed nothing myself, sir," he answered.

"He was alone?" questioned the Doctor again.

"Yes, sir. He told us that Mr. Bird, the architect, who had been with him, had gone across the country on special business."

"And did he speak as if anything had vexed him over the building matters?" continued the Doctor.

"He did not say a word about them, sir."

"Can you recall any remark he made of any kind?"

Webster pondered. "Yes, sir," he said at last. "The General asked if we knew any stranger in the neighbourhood—a woman in a yellow cloak. We told him we did not; and then he said that he thought she must be somebody a little out of her mind. I don't remember anything else, sir."

"Little enough," returned the Doctor. "Well, we must hope for the best."

"Are all well at your place?" asked Edgar of Dr. Palmer, who was thinking of Charles Carr.

"They were all well when I left this morning," answered the Doctor, cheerily. "I haven't been in my own house since nine o'clock. A doctor has a hard life, with but little leisure for domestic amenities. Good-bye, Edgar, you'll see me again very soon; and I hope to find a change for the better," he added, as he drove away.

Edgar Vivian found his sister standing at the back of the hall. She did not say a word—did not ask one question: but she looked in his face, and then putting her hand through his arm, she laid her head on his shoulder and began to cry quietly.

"O come, sissy, this will never do," said Edgar as brightly as he could. "We shall have you ill, next."

"We have none of us been really good to my uncle," sobbed Maria.

Edgar was silent for a moment. "You, at least, have nothing to blame yourself for," he said, gently.

"You don't know," she answered, looking up, the tears streaming down her cheeks. "I know he has been often sadly puzzled and troubled about me. But indeed, indeed, I could not help it!"

Edgar thought he knew what she was thinking about. "You must not look at things thus," he said. "It was but natural my uncle should wish to see his favourite, his dear little girl, well settled in life. Yet he is the last man who would force anyone's inclination."

Maria looked aside and said, "You will remember to let me know when Allan Grale comes this evening—don't forget that."

"Why, he has been here and has gone again," answered Edgar, wondering. "I did ask him to stay; I said you wanted to see him. Though, indeed, I didn't really think you would care to do so now in the midst of this trouble."

"Is there no trouble about Charles Carr?" she asked in low, reproachful tones. "I—I"—she spoke with hesitation—"thought Allan might have told me the particulars."

"Not much trouble, I fancy," replied Edgar: "the Doctor has

heard nothing yet. I expect that will prove to be a regular mare's nest. I suppose you would like to beg Allan's good offices for him with his father, but I don't know that he could do much. When that old gentleman takes a will of his own, he listens to nobody. Allan will do his best for Charles, I am certain, without your good word, Maria. I have excellent reasons for knowing that he is a thoroughly kind-hearted fellow."

"Do not praise Allan Grale to me," she returned, with something as near sternness as was possible to her gentle nature.

"Once you liked to hear his praises," observed Edgar, looking at her keenly. He wondered what the break between them was. This sister of his was as much a puzzle to Edgar just now as she had been to the General.

"That she and Allan have not ceased to care for each other, I am convinced of," was Edgar's mental decision. "They are as much in love as ever. What can it be? It seems more serious than an ordinary lovers' quarrel. Surely all will come right yet!"

That same evening, before sunset, Maria found an opportunity to steal away to the place on the Dering road, which Webster had indicated as the scene of her uncle's accident. She had no difficulty in finding the exact spot. The wayside flowers and grass lay as they had been crushed by the weight of the General's form. She could see the marks of his horse's hoofs, and the footprints of the good folk who had come to his succour.

But she did not find the missing spade-guinea, though she sought for it long and patiently.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MANUSCRIPT.

It is impossible to describe Dr. Palmer's indignation when he reached home and learned all that had happened since he left it. Charles Carr had not been there; he was still detained in the counting-house at the Works; and between his prolonged absence, and the coming of one or two messengers from old Mr. Grale, Lettice and Agnes Palmer were reduced to a state of bewilderment.

Dr. Palmer hurried at once to Mr. Grale's counting-house and demanded to see the master. He found old Grale stubbornly mysterious, asserting that Charles Carr knew well enough with what he was charged: while young Carr steadily asserted that he did not in the least understand what the matter was at all.

Mr. Grale produced the facsimile envelopes and stamps which had been found in Charles's desk, and laid them down before Dr. Palmer, without a word, but with significant emphasis. At the sight of these, despite his anger, the Doctor laughed. He told Mr. Grale that everybody knew Charles Carr was clever in that way; that he had

given some specimens of this skill to both Mrs. Grale and Miss Vivian, for their stalls at the Dering library bazaar. Then old Grale fell back on the roll of paper which Charlie withheld from his scrutiny. Charles volunteered instantly to show it to the Doctor, who glanced hastily at it, and assured the manufacturer that there was nothing suspicious about it, that it did not concern his business, and was not even written on his paper. Dr. Palmer took formal possession of this document, promising Mr. Grale that it should not pass out of his own hands, and that it should be produced whenever he chose to formulate his accusation. He could scarcely restrain a smile as he entered into this solemn agreement. Then he insisted that Charles should be released from his durance and return with him. Mr. Grale offered no opposition: he knew he had already exceeded his rights.

Though the Doctor tried to carry off the matter lightly to Mr. Grale, as if it could be worthy of no other treatment, yet he went home feeling vexed and embittered. Mr. Grale had said that he had been subjected to a system of robbery lately, not only in the counting-house but at his bankers', and it could be only someone in that counting-house, as he believed, who had pursued it. Upon none of the clerks did, or could, suspicion rest, except Carr.

Dr. Palmer knew the world well enough to know what a suspicion of this kind is, and how little can be done to combat it. If an orphan lad, like Charles Carr, were driven to seek redress against one so powerful as Mr. Grale, he might succeed or he might fail, but the world at large would only remember that he was somehow mixed up with a disagreeable charge of dishonesty. Yet should Carr decide to let Mr. Grale's injustice pass, the world would believe that the rich man had extended a gracious clemency to his youth and loneliness.

But, after all, Dr. Palmer was a sunny-hearted man, one of those who have such a keen enjoyment of life, and so elastic a faith in goodness everywhere, that the shadows of earth's perpetual suffering, however darkly they fall, pass swiftly over their heads.

Therefore, next morning, when he was awakened by a fresh breeze blowing through his casement, and bearing in the perfume of dewy flowers and the sweet song of blackbirds nested in the great trees of his garden, he again felt soothed and peaceful. There must not be "peace at any price,"—no; and yet, "as much as in you lieth, live at peace with all men," is an apostolic injunction. Peace and neighbourly happiness were surely worth some sacrifice, and might not the sacrifice be, after all, only of a little worthless pride and injured feeling?

He went at once to Charles's room, and knocked at the door. It was still very early, but the young man said "Come in."

Charles, up and dressed, was seated by the open window; but the sweet scents and sounds of early morning had evidently failed to tranquillize him.

"Well, Charlie," said the Doctor kindly, "how are you? Head

ache, I see! We must not allow ourselves to be too much disturbed by this foolish blunder of Mr. Grale's, you know. We must even remember that he is an elderly man and you are a very young one, and we must regard his surveillance and suspicion from this point of view."

"I know that I was only admitted to his counting-house by his special kindness," admitted Charles. "I remembered that. But that does not make this more easy to bear."

"Certainly not," said the Doctor, sympathetically. "Only I am not sure whether we were wise not to show that roll of paper at once. Why not? It was that, I imagine, which chiefly angered him."

There was a moment's silence. Then Charles spoke in a strangely significant tone.

"Have you read it through yet, yourself, sir?"

"No, Charles," he said kindly. "I have been thinking more about the writer than about his writings. I only glanced at it enough to see that you had been trying your hand at a work of fiction."

Another pause. Then in the same low voice, Charles remarked:

"If it is shown to Mr. Grale, he may choose to read it carefully. I should like you to read it first, sir."

"Very well, my boy," said the Doctor, "I'll do as you wish. And, trust me, I won't make any move without telling you first."

The young man's face was turned towards the garden. He did not respond to the Doctor's promise by either word or glance.

Dr. Palmer went back to his own chamber, feeling that he did not altogether understand the young man's manner this morning. The mysterious roll of papers which had so excited Mr. Grale, lay on the toilet table, where Dr. Palmer had put it the night before. It consisted of five or six sheets of common foolscap, closely written over. Its heading was simply:—

"Mark Bedell."

The Doctor began to read it in rather an absent sort of way. But as he went on, the expression of his face changed; it grew grave, and yet with that strange gravity in which a tear and a smile lie very near each other. It was a tale of silent and hapless love, and it ended at the hero's grave.

At one point, the Doctor dropped the paper, and spoke:

"Ah, the secret slips out plainly there! I wonder if he ever noticed that he actually wrote the real names—Charles Carr and Lettice Palmer? And Charlie tells his tale well. I have heard it said that every man can write one story!"

And when the perusal was over, the Doctor slipped the sheets once more into their little elastic band, saying to himself:—

"Poor fellow! poor fellow! And so this is the difficulty, is it? and this is his solution thereof. I wonder if my lassie dreams anything of all this. I don't believe it. And I suppose this is my fault—if her mother had lived, she would have foreseen this and guarded

against it. And yet—why? Carr is a good fellow, with plenty of brain, if only he were not so frail! An early widowhood would be a sad fate for Lettice. And yet again—far better is a widowed existence than a widowed heart."

And the Doctor thought of his own long, faithful loneliness, and how there was no bliss in the world for which he would exchange the memory of his few short years of married life.

But he had no time for reverie. He could hear the voices of his daughters on their way down to the breakfast-room.

"I must speak to Charlie again as I pass his room," he decided. "He has really shown a chivalric spirit over this matter. I daresay he expects I shall be angry, and is waiting in fear and trembling. Well, it won't do to encourage him. Besides, how can I?—when I don't know what Lettice may think about the matter. What cue can I take? I'll make believe not to see anything particular in the paper. Only I'll assure him I've read it through—every word!"

"Well, Charlie!" he said, as he again entered the still shady room where the young man sat in pain, motionless as death. "I've read it through, and I think it's a very pretty story and very well written. Only why didn't you make it end well? There is nothing in it that you need be ashamed of. I don't profess to be a judge in literature, so you must only take my opinion for what it is worth. I never dreamed of your having talents and tastes of this kind."

Charles uttered not one word.

"I shan't show this at once to Mr. Grale," the Doctor went on. "I think it would be really giving way to him too much. I will tell him that I have read it, and what it is—if he wants more than that, he proves that he mistrusts me as much as he does you, Charlie."

As he descended the stairs he could see his pretty breakfast table, with its blue service—of which Mrs. Vivian had characteristically remarked that it was wonderful what pretty patterns were now used in common china—and its glass bowl filled with marguerites.

"I'm afraid you've not had a much better night than poor Charlie himself, girls," he said, when he noted his daughters' sad faces. "He is not fit to stir, and you must send him up his breakfast and keep the house quiet. You young things take life so hardly. As you grow older, you'll accept troubles like rainy days, as being all in the course of the seasons and necessary for the development of things."

"I don't believe injustice and falsehood are ever necessary or can be good for anybody," said Agnes Palmer, rather indignantly.

"But take care that you never call mere fear and enquiry by those hard names, Agnes," said her father. "Nobody will be more sorry than Mr. Grale when he is once convinced of his mistakes."

"He will have to be convinced," she returned.

"I mean to convince him, Agnes. He has been too hasty; especially in his suspicions about a roll of paper he found in Charlie's desk."

"We have heard of that mysterious roll," said Agnes. "What is really in it, papa?"

"My dear girl," said Dr. Palmer, "it is not exactly any business of ours. I should never have seen it, but that Charlie felt he must confide in somebody when Mr. Grale accused him. Therefore I must treat it precisely as I treat my professional business."

The Doctor's daughters knew the full significance of this phrase. They had been trained to have so jealous a regard for professional honour and etiquette, that Agnes used to say that they must often seem to ignore the palpable sicknesses and sufferings of their neighbours. They both took their father's hint, and dropped the subject. The Doctor usually rose promptly from table, but this morning he lingered over the newspaper. He did not wish to go up to the Mill counting-house until Mr. Grale was quite sure to be there.

Agnes went off about her accustomed household duties, but Lettice kept her seat. Her father stole one or two glances at her over his paper. She sat gazing through the open window, but was evidently seeing sad visions of her own, rather than the fair features of the rich valley which stretched below Dering.

Suddenly the Doctor folded his paper with a brisk rustle. "I should think Mr. Grale must be there by this time," he said, rising.

Lettice rose too and came round the table and stood beside her father. She put her hand through his arm.

"Well," said the Doctor, turning to his daughter with more than his usual kindness of tone and manner, "well, and what is my Lettice wanting now?"

Lettice did not speak. She wound herself round in front of her father, and raising her other hand to his shoulder drew down his head.

"What *is* she wanting?" said the Doctor, with a quaint affectation of intense curiosity, which had a genuine wistfulness in it.

She nestled her head on his shoulder. "You will try to clear up things for Charlie," she whispered. "I know you will."

"Trust me, my dear," said her father.

"But the things must be made right," she said, suddenly rising from her caressing attitude. "Nothing must be merely passed over. Forgiveness is the direst injury when we want only justice."

"Trust me," said the Doctor again. Once more the little brown head dropped, and there came forth soft tones of child-like deprecation. "You're not angry with me for saying so much, papa?"

"Angry!" echoed the Doctor. "What have I done that my little girl should suspect me of being an ogre? Only, you think you care for Charlie more than I do—is that it?"

The tone was jesting, but had Lettice looked into her father's face, she would have seen how grave it was.

"I know you always care for everybody, papa," she whispered.

"And you only sometimes care for somebody, you mean?"

"I want things to be made really right, so that Charles can be happy here again, as he always has been," Lettice said. "Yesterday evening he spoke about having to go away. It would be dreadful!"

"Yes, yes," assented the Doctor. "It is sad to go away against one's will. It is quite different when all is happy and one goes of one's own choice."

"It would never be Charles's choice to go away from you," asserted Lettice, fearlessly, looking up with innocent sweet eyes.

The Doctor gave a short laugh, lifted her caressing hands from his arms and put them back, as it were, into her own keeping.

"I'm not so sure of that," he said. "I should not be very much surprised if you do the same yourself, in due time."

He moved away out of the room. But as he crossed the threshold, he looked round. Lettice stood where he had left her: her face was crimson and her eyes were full of tears. Her father turned back, and caught her in his arms.

"Cheer up, little woman!" he cried; "and trust me I'll do as much for Charlie as if—as if he was my own son!"

"I have never felt anything else," said Agnes, entering the room at that moment, and catching only the last words. "I am sure he has always been like a dear kind brother to me."

The Doctor rushed away. "I suppose I'm an old fool," he whispered to himself. "I suppose I have said exactly those things which ought not to have been said. I know Mrs. Vivian would tell me so, and so would Miss Grale. Hang Mrs. Vivian and Miss Grale!"

With which ungallant sentiment the Doctor hurried on his way. Upon presenting himself at the door of the counting-house, he was met by the prim old clerk, Mr. Wilton.

"O, it's you, Dr. Palmer," he said. "Come in, come in; I'm glad you've called, sir."

"I've called to see Mr. Grale, Wilton."

"Yes, sir, no doubt. Take a seat."

"And I intend to see him, Wilton; and to find out what all this nonsensical accusation means."

"Mr. Grale's away," said Wilton with a jerk, as if the worst had still to come out, and he rather feared the consequences. "Mr. Grale had a telegram from Manchester last night, and he went off by the first train this morning."

Dr. Palmer looked too angry to speak.

"His instructions to me were that things must stand as they are until he comes back; and that Mr. Carr—please understand, Dr. Palmer, that I am only carrying out the master's orders," the old clerk broke off to say—"that Mr. Carr is not to enter the counting-house until his return; but his salary will go on all thesame ——"

"He will neither enter the counting-house nor will his salary go on," was the indignant interruption.

"They were the master's orders to me, sir, and I can only carry them out," repeated the little man deprecatingly, seeing the wrath in Dr. Palmer's face.

"This is much too bad!" cried the Doctor. "He has no right to go away like this!"

"Sir," pleaded Mr. Wilton, "it's a matter of business in Manchester that may be worth thousands to him."

"Are Charles Carr's feelings and fair fame of no moment?" asked Dr. Palmer. "To go away like this, after raising this mysterious and groundless accusation against this young man, is a most cruel——"

"No accusation has been made yet," interrupted Mr. Wilton, "he said there would be time enough for that when he came home."

"Time enough!" echoed the angry Doctor. "Too much time! What are your important telegrams and your thousands of pounds compared with human hearts and human health!"

"Mr. Grale has to look after his own interests," urged the bewildered Wilton. "A man of business, sir, must attend to his business."

"And when, pray, will Mr. Grale return?"

"We don't know," coldly answered Wilton. "He'll stay till his business is done, and then come back quite suddenly. That's his way."

"Well, Wilton," said the Doctor, "pardon me for speaking so sharply, but the sharpness isn't for you, remember; it is for Mr. Grale. He must suspect and accuse as he chooses, but let him take heed that he may be doing it at his peril."

"I don't want to defend the master's ways of doing things," said the old clerk. "And I've no doubts about Mr. Carr myself. But the master has grounds for his suspicions, there's no denying that, and it is small wonder if he entertains them. I had to agree with Mr. Grale that what he told me in confidence looked bad—but I also said it might admit of explanation."

"And what did he tell you in confidence?" chafed Dr. Palmer.

"Well, sir, I can tell you in confidence the same thing," said poor old Wilton, who was a man of peace and did not like strife. "It was the *name* of the man, seeing it where he did, that upset Mr. Grale; 'Mark Bedell.' Did you ever hear it?"

Dr. Palmer stared at him for a second and then smiled. "Oh, yes, I know all about him, Wilton," he answered.

This time it was Wilton's turn to stare. "If you can lay your hands on him," he said with a significant pause, "why then some of the difficulty would be over."

"I can't do that," said Dr. Palmer. "The man is a myth; he never existed except in name."

"A man must be pretty real, and pretty much alive, too, before he can draw bills and cheques," said Mr. Wilton solemnly.

"Oh—" ejaculated the Doctor, now completely at sea.

"That's it, sir: Mark Bedell, or a man using his name, is the person

who has been committing these frauds on Mr. Grale and has got his money."

"Wilton, I cannot understand you," said the Doctor after a bewildered pause; "what is it you mean?"

"I mean that the person who has been drawing bills on Mr. Grale and put them into circulation and obtained the money for them; and who has drawn out cheques to himself—Mr. Grale's cheques, and signed them with Mr. Grale's name—and got them cashed over the counter at the bankers', is Mark Bedell."

Dr. Palmer could not speak at first for astonishment.

"Who is Mark Bedell? where is he to be found?" he said at last.

"That is what we would like to get at," was Wilton's answer. "Mr. Grale thinks he has a clue now, because he saw the name in Mr. Carr's desk, in Mr. Carr's handwriting, and with that exception he has never seen it but on the bills and the cheques."

"Why could he not have said this to Mr. Carr?"

"Well, sir, it strikes me that the question might rather lie the other way. Why did not Mr. Carr explain what he meant by having that name in his desk—and why did he refuse to allow the master to inspect the roll of paper on which he saw it?"

"He shall see it, he shall see it," cried the Doctor eagerly, "when he returns. I give you my word of honour, Wilton, that nothing can be more innocent than that roll of paper."

"I quite believe you, Doctor, and I shall believe in Mr. Carr until he is proved guilty—and I can't think that will ever be. But you must see that Mr. Grale had grounds for suspecting the young man."

"I do see," assented Dr. Palmer, speaking from the depths of puzzled thought. "This matter seems to me very mysterious. When will Mr. Grale be back?"

"Sir, I have already told you that it is impossible to say. The very day that his business in Manchester is over; rely upon that. Not but that I think it likely he will take the opportunity of his absence to make enquiry into this other business," added the clerk.

"Well, good day to you, Wilton," said the Doctor, holding out his hand. "Of course, I shall not say anything of this, except to Charles Carr. Who takes the lead here in Mr. Grale's place?"

"I do, subject in general things to Mr. Allan," replied Mr. Wilton. "Good morning, Doctor."

As Dr. Palmer crossed the courtyard, full of perplexed thought over what he had heard, a breeze, freshening rather suddenly, began to blow. It set the dust whirling, and made the Doctor say to himself that the autumn leaves had come. It blew something right against the Doctor's face, which then fluttered down and settled on his arm. It was a triangular shred of paper, a fragment of some note which had been crumpled and torn up. He looked at it, as it lay on his sleeve. There were only two words on it, and these words had been evidently on different lines, and one was "reduced" and the other "spade."

The Doctor turned the paper over. No writing was on the other side, only a monogram; the monogram of the Carstow Gentlemen's Cricket Club.

"Dear me!" he mused, "is some young local dandy threatening those whom it may concern that he will be 'reduced' to take a 'spade?' The best thing for him, in all likelihood!"

Then he shook off the fragment and thought no more about it.

"There is certainly some mystery about this Mark Bedell," he said, returning to his own musings. "It seems scarcely likely that Charles would take a real name and put it bodily into that poor little fiction of his. But I don't blame Grale as I did before I knew this."

CHAPTER XII.

BEWARE!

CHARLES CARR seemed as bewildered as Dr. Palmer himself, when he heard of Mr. Wilton's extraordinary statement about "Mark Bedell." Of one thing he declared himself positive: that he had taken the name from no real person, though he could give no better reason for his choosing it than that "it came into his head." He had thought first of giving another christian name, but had finally decided on "Mark." He could tell no more, because he had no more to tell. For the present, things had to be left at this.

And then day after day went by for a week or two, and still Mr. Grale did not return, and Charles was doomed to wear out slow hours of restless leisure.

At Dering Court, too, things went on in a dismal monotony of their own. The Doctors came and went. The wife, the nephews, and the niece, were in devoted attendance on the General, save that two or three times, George Vivian, who looked pale, and seemed absent-minded, took a hurried journey to London. The invalid had regained consciousness and memory, except as regarded the circumstances of his seizure. On that his mind was a perfect blank. He could recall nothing after his leaving the "Knight's Arms." He had not yet had another attack; but the medical men said one was always imminent, and that the least excitement might suffice to bring it on. Evidently George Vivian did not like that opinion, and sighed over it.

Every morning a servant came from Moorland House to enquire after the General's health, and twice since Mr. Grale's absence Mrs. Grale and Mary Anne had ordered their carriage in the same direction, taking up some offering from their vinery. Only Allan Grale had never put in an appearance at the Court since that afternoon of the General's seizure, when he had brought up the Oriental box for Edgar Vivian's keeping. George imagined, judging from his own feelings, that young Grale shrank from the sad associations of sickness and impending death; while Edgar thought him a strange fellow, whose

undoubted kindliness—for Allan was kind—might choose to take refuge under apparent indifference. Maria had not again expressed a wish to see Allan: possibly, as she heard nothing further about it, she thought the trouble about Charles Carr might have ended.

But Maria felt inwardly restless. She walked out often, choosing generally the way that led to the Mill and to Moorland House. It might be that she was hoping to meet Allan Grale.

It was on one of these rambles, one Monday afternoon, when all things seemed dull at home—Edgar low spirited and George away in London—that Maria saw the Grale carriage at the door of Nurse Kate's cottage. Both the ladies had evidently alighted and gone in, for Mrs. Grale's wrapper and Mary Anne's parasol were lying on the vacant seat. Maria went on, towards the Palmers', thinking that whatever might be the Grales' shortcomings they were not remiss in their attentions to old dependants.

In reality Mrs. Grale's present visit to the nurse had grown out of that visit of Allan's, when he carried the old woman some flowers as a screen to his disposal of the Oriental box. This afternoon Mrs. Grale had discovered that she had come to the end of her hampers. She had sent out several lately, and somehow the boxes and baskets had not been returned so quickly as usual. Mrs. Grale's wealth, if it had made her simplicity vulgar, at least had not so demoralised her as to render her careless of small economies. Her daughter might sniff at her mother's thrift in packthread, and precise reckonings of jam-pots, but Mrs. Grale was not to be misled from her old habits. So when she saw the empty hamper-closet, she, remembering that one had gone to Nurse Kate's, directed her afternoon drive to the nurse's cottage.

It was a wonder that Mary Anne Grale chose to alight at the old servant's. But it was a windy afternoon, with a good deal of dust flying, and as she knew her mother often indulged in a long chat, Mary Anne consulted her own comfort by going in also.

The old woman eagerly welcomed them, pouring out thanks for all the nice things Mr. Allan had brought her that past day. "I thought shame of not coming up to thank you, ma'am," she said, "but my ankle's been uncommon bad."

"I thought as much, Kate," said Mrs. Grale. "Only I want my basket. We will just take it back ourselves, in the carriage."

"The basket, ma'am?" echoed the nurse. She was a little old woman, in a capacious lilac apron, with a withered-apple sort of face set in a broad cap-frilling, and an expression of mingled infantine innocence and witch-like cunning.

"Yes, the basket," repeated Mrs. Grale. "You've not forgotten it, I suppose. A good fresh hamper, one of the new sort; square, with a flat lid, and a handle in the middle of it."

"Aye, I mind it," said the old woman. "But Mr. Allan did not leave it here, ma'am; he took it away with him. I was real vexed

that he did, but he would have his own way. I think he had something in it that he was taking somewhere else."

"He had nothing in it from me," returned Mrs. Grale. "I expect he just brought it away to save you trouble, Kate, and then set it down anywhere instead of putting it back in its right place."

They chatted for a while, and then drove home. There they found a few letters lying on the hall table awaiting them. One was for Allan. Mary Anne did not know the writing, but she casually took it up and looked at it. The envelope bore the stamped seal of the Carstow Cricket Club, of which Allan was a member. "Only some circular or notice from the club," thought she, carelessly.

How could she imagine that Allan might have a correspondent whom he kept regularly supplied with these innocent-looking envelopes of the club? Allan might be in a strait just now, but somebody else was in it also, and their communications with one another had to be jealously guarded from suspicion. That such ways are not the ways of wisdom or of pleasantness, and do not lead to peace, might have been seen on Allan's face had anybody been watching him when he took up that harmless-looking letter. But he thrust it into his pocket; it could only be read in the solitude of his own room.

At dinner Mrs. Grale forgot all about the basket, her attention having been turned to other things; but in the evening, when her thoughts reverted to their usual domestic grooves, she remembered it.

"Where is that hamper you took to old Kate's, Alny?" she asked suddenly.

Allan started from a gloomy reverie. He had meant to fetch that hamper from its singular hiding place before this, but somehow had not yet done it. Nurse Kate's cottage was so near the Court, that going there might mean encountering Miss Vivian—and Maria, the one woman in all the world whom he had ever loved, was now the one woman whom he shrank from holding an interview with.

"I'll see that you get the hamper to-morrow, mother," he said.

"Tell me where you've put it," persisted Mrs. Grale, "or you'll forget all about it, and I shall never see it again. Kate says you took it away."

Allan gave a light laugh. "Well, I know I did," he admitted. "I called in at one or two places afterwards—so I can't tell quite certainly where it is, but you shall have it again, never fear."

"That's the way things get lost," said Mrs. Grale, plaintively. "And our name is not on it—only a G, which might as well stand for Gordon at the shop, or for Gray the station-master. The sooner you look after it, the better."

"I'll go at once," said Allan, rising with alacrity. He felt suddenly uneasy about that hamper. Suppose somebody else found it among the ferns, and suppose it found its way back thence to his mother? How should he explain its being there?

"I did not mean that you need be in quite such a hurry," observed

the mother, "but if you want a walk, you may as well have an errand."

It was twilight when he started on this quest. It occurred to him that he was little likely to meet Maria Vivian at that hour. That letter with the Carstow Club seal lay in his pocket like a weight of burning lead. When he got home, he would have to write a certain note—a short note—but it would take him some time to do !

Maria had called at Dr. Palmer's that afternoon, and found nobody there but himself. He had insisted on her coming in, saying that his young folks would return very shortly.

She was not sorry for a quiet talk with the good Doctor. The anxieties which her uncle had confided to her, immediately before his illness, had taken root in her mind, and were springing up abundantly. She was not happy about either of her brothers. Edgar, whose confidant she had been, was now writing and receiving many letters of which he told her nothing. But her chief anxiety concerned George. He looked worn and troubled, and a singular absent-mindedness kept him continually making strange omissions or mistakes. After the first day or two of his uncle's illness, he had ventured to leave him for a visit to London ; latterly, he had been going there nearly every other day, though he certainly did not stay long. He always seemed a little more cheerful before he started, and he always came back very weary and depressed. Once or twice, he had spoken of the weary burden of conventionality, and of that sweet simplicity of life which men banish far from their ways, and then profess to admire at a distance. It was as if his mind's eye was being drawn away from all that he had hitherto held dear—as if he felt some change or doom was hanging over him. Maria noted all this, and a rather curious dread had seized upon her.

She feared that this cherished brother, hitherto so open and light hearted, might be suspecting himself to be the victim of some insidious, perhaps deadly, malady, whose progress he was trying to combat and check in secret. She knew George was not considered strong ; anxiety had often been entertained for him. Edgar had always the best of health, but George had been often ailing.

Maria could not speak fully of her thoughts and fears to even so old and trusted a friend as Dr. Palmer. Yet there was comfort in his cheery presence : and, as he had promised, his young people were not long in returning. They came in, flushed with their exertions in sun and breeze. Maria looked a little pale as she shook hands with Charles Carr. No word had ever passed between her and the Palmers concerning the breach with old Mr. Grale, and this was her first meeting with Charlie since it had happened.

"Look what we have found!" said Agnes, gaily, taking from Charlie's hand a fresh looking basket with a flat top and a handle in the centre. They had evidently promptly utilised their trover, for it was now full of ferns.

"Where did you find that?" asked the Doctor. "It makes a great show beside Letty's cracked old vasculum."

"I always said you should get me something new in that line, papa," she retorted, "and now, you see, the fates have done your duty for you. But I suppose we must make due inquiries after the owner of this very pretty thing."

"You have not yet told us where you found it," persisted the Doctor.

"That is the queer part," said Agnes. "It was in the woods of the Camp, not very far from the lodge of Dering Court."

"Yes," said Lettice, "I was stooping to cut out a rich cushion of moss, when I saw the yellow wicker basket show from under the heavy fronds of bracken."

"And then we were afraid to open it," laughed Agnes. "So Charles kicked it over, and said it was very light, and then the lid came open, and we saw there was nothing inside."

"Well," said the Doctor, "it's quite true that one may come across awkward finds in such a way—perhaps the first step to the unearthing and discovery of some terrible crime."

"But scarcely in such a place as Dering, papa," dissented Lettice, who believed her native village to be a kind of modern Eden.

"This was harmless enough, at any rate," said Agnes. "But who could have thought of hiding an empty basket?"

"And a new basket, too," remarked Maria. "Does not that look like a G upon it?"

"Yes, it is a G," answered Charles. "It may belong to the Grales."

"No, the Grales' hampers are of the lumbering old-fashioned sort, and their name is always stamped in full inside the lids," said Agnes. "But I'm sure whoever put the basket there intended to hide it."

The ferns and basket were carried away, and nothing more was said or thought about them. After tea, Dr. Palmer set off to walk to the Court with Maria. They took the lower road, leading past the Church, and had not gone many yards, when Webster, of the "Knight's Arms," drove up in his chaise. He had been taking down a passenger for the evening train. Touching his hat, he pulled up to enquire after the General.

He was told that his old master had been getting better for some little time now; had recovered consciousness, and in a degree, memory, except so far as the period of his attack was concerned.

"He recollects leaving your place, Webster," said Dr. Palmer. "For he says he ought to have taken your wife's advice and rested a little longer—those were the last words she said to him as he mounted his horse. All beyond that is quite a blank."

"It's queer," remarked Webster, "that we've never heard who the gentleman was that first came across the General after the accident. As I said to you, ma'am, at the time, it didn't seem like a stranger,

because of his knowing the General's name, and the sign of my house, and the like. And yet, if he was anybody belonging to the neighbourhood, it seems odd that he does not come forward. Nobody appears to have seen him but the boy, Joe Ward, and he is pretty new to the place, and doesn't know residents from visitors."

"It is certainly singular," observed Dr. Palmer. "The General's memory of the matter may return some day with a flash, and then he will tell us all about it."

Maria thought of the lost spade-guinea. It had never been found or heard of. That also seemed singular.

Webster added a bit of news before he drove away.

"Mr. Grale's back to-night at last," he said. "And he must have come in quite unexpected, for there was no carriage to meet him. That's his way in general: he likes to drop on his people unawares," laughed Webster. And, touching his hat again, the host of the "Knight's Arms" drove off.

Dr. Palmer and Maria walked on in silence. For Webster's remarks had furnished each of them with food for private meditation. A turn of the road brought them face to face with Mrs. Massey, that village widow who had once sought Maria's advice as to taking in a strange lodger.

She stopped them with a deep curtsey. Her business was urgent. She was on her way to fetch the Doctor to the woodman's house in Dering Camp, where a sick baby had just been seized with convulsions.

"I can walk fast," said sympathetic Maria to Dr. Palmer. "Our roads will lie together for a little while, and when we part I shall not be very far from the Court, and it will not be dark, only twilight."

Certainly the Doctor could not have allowed a mere matter of gallant attention to divert him from his duty in a combat between life and death, but he liked the quiet way in which Miss Vivian settled it. They walked forward quickly, and Mrs. Massey kept beside them.

"And how are you getting on with your new inmate?" Maria asked her. For she knew that the stranger was lodging at the widow's.

"Well, so-so, ma'am, thank you," said Mrs. Massey. "She gives very little trouble; and she's away as much as she's at home."

"What is her name?" asked Maria.

"She calls herself Jane West," answered Mrs. Massey, with a caution which clearly betrayed mistrust. "And she pays her rent in advance."

"Then what are you uneasy about?" asked Dr. Palmer.

Maria saw that the widow was embarrassed, and came good-naturedly to the rescue. "Mrs. Massey thinks there is something strange about her, I believe; something more than meets the eye."

"Well, I can't get it out of my mind that it is so," acknowledged the widow.

"Do you know where she comes from?" inquired Dr. Palmer.

"She has wrote to me once or twice from London and dates her

letters from Philpot Street, Stepney. But she didn't say if that is her real home, sir, nor how long she has lived there."

"Philpot Street is a respectable street," observed the Doctor, "I happen to know it. It is close to one of the Great London Hospitals, and is quite a superior street for its neighbourhood. If this woman's habits are quiet and respectable, I don't see that you need be uneasy, Mrs. Massey."

"I've no fault to find with herself," said the widow. "She's pleasant like, with a sensible, cautious sort of manner. But a sort of suspicion about her got into my head at first, may be at her wearing such a particular coloured cloak. It's yellow, sir, and I've never seen the like of such a one before."

"It may have come as a fashion from Paris," laughed the Doctor, as they all paused at the corner where he and the widow must turn aside to the woodman's cottage, leaving Maria to pursue the short remainder of her walk alone.

As she went on, she turned and looked behind her in the gathering twilight. She wondered that they had not been overtaken by her brother George, if he had come home by the train: he had been staying in London for two or three days. Maria was still looking backwards, when there was a sudden sound of footsteps near her; but these were in front, though she had seen nobody advancing towards her. Looking forward with a start, and a sudden leaping of her heart, she saw Allan Grale in the middle of the road, only a few paces in front of her!

This piece of road ran quite straight between high hedges, broken not far off by the lodge gates of Dering Court. Yet Maria was sure nobody had been there only a second before. As Allan could not have risen from the ground, where could he have come from?

"You here—so late—alone, Miss Vivian!" he exclaimed. He seemed out of breath—and surely he looked pale and wild!

"I am near home," she said. No mere ordinary greeting passed between them. And it was she who held out her hand to him.

"Can you do that still?" he asked, in a half choking voice.

"I can," she answered in a tone thrilled with emotion, "I can. Nothing can ever be with us as it might have been. But something always remains. Allan,"——but here she dropped her voice to a whisper so low that even the very air around could not catch the words. "Let me hear you bid me trust you on this one point," she went on, raising it again.

"Trust me!" he echoed, with a depth of bitterness and remorse, painful to her ear.

"If I thought I could not trust you so far, then may God strengthen me to prevent the evil that would ensue. You will thank me some day, Allan, if I save you from this last sin."

"Nobody else can ever suffer as I have made you suffer," he groaned.

"Never mind me," she answered, gently. "I have a right to suffer—you cannot help that."

"You can help it, Maria," he said passionately. "Save me from this terrible, haunting thought of you and your pain! Don't you know how *I* suffer? My very life is a burden to me. What is done cannot be undone. I would undo it if I could," he added with increased emotion.

"I cannot forget it," she answered. "You cannot take away my memory."

"No no; but in future, Maria—perhaps in future ——"

"Stay, Allan, there can be no hope of that kind now. Yet out of our wrecked lives, yours and mine, God can build——"

But what else she would have said Allan Grale never heard. For as they stood together, hand clasped in hand, pleading one with the other, love and anguish shining forth from the eyes of both, a slight form draped in a long yellow cloak came stealthily up the darkening road, under the shadow of the hedge. Unseen, she drew near—but Allan saw her as she glided past behind Maria. And on Maria's ear there fell in a low whisper, almost like the hiss of a serpent, one single word :—

"Beware!"

And the woman vanished into the twilight as rapidly and as stealthily as she had come.

Maria, seized with sudden terror, scarcely knew how she reached the Court. Allan Grale walked beside her to the lodge gates. There they parted with a lingering hand-pressure; but neither of them spoke another word.

When Allan got back to Moorland House, it was without his mother's hamper. But the excitement, caused in the household by Mr. Grale's unexpected return, saved him from any questions on the subject.

(To be continued.)

CARAMEL COTTAGE.

UNDER THE SUMMER-APPLE TREE.

WE have a saying in England, "It never rains but it pours," as applied, not to the rain, but to the occurrences of daily life. Dyke Manor was generally quiet enough, but on Thursday evening—the Thursday already told of—we were destined to have visitors. First of all, arrived Mr. Jacobson, our neighbour at Elm Farm, with his nephew, young Harry Dene; he had his gig put up, meaning to make an evening of it. It turned out to be a night, or nearly so, as you will soon find. Close upon that, Charles Stirling of the Court (my place) came in; and Mrs. Todhetley went to the kitchen to say that we should require supper. The stirring events of the week had brought them over—namely, the encounter on our land between the poachers and the keepers, and the flight of the valuable yard dog, Don, a Newfoundland.

That afternoon, Thursday, we had heard, as may be remembered, that Don was at Evesham, under the keeping of Mr. Dick Standish; and I had been told by Katrine Barbary that Mr. Reste had suddenly and unexpectedly disappeared from Caramel Cottage. Old Jacobson predicted that Dick Standish would come to be hanged; Charles Stirling said he ought to be transported.

"Of course you will prosecute him, Squire?" said Charles Stirling.

"Of course I shall," replied the Squire, warmly. "The police have him already safe enough if they've done their duty, and I shall be over at Evesham in the morning."

After a jolly supper they got to their pipes, and the time went by on wings. At least, that's what the master of Elm Farm said when the clocks struck eleven, and he asked leave to order his gig.

It was brought round by Giles, the groom; and we were all assembled in the hall to speed the departure, when old Jones, the constable, burst in upon us at the full speed of his gouty legs, his face in a white heat.

Private information had reached Jones half an hour ago that the poachers intended to be out again that night, but he could not learn in which direction.

Then commotion arose. The Squire and his friend Jacobson were like two demented wild Indians, uncertain what was best to be done to entrap the villains. The gig was ordered away again.

Some time passed in discussion. In these moments of excitement one cannot always bring one's keenest wits to the fore. Charles Stirling offered to go out and reconnoitre; we, you may be quite sure, were eager to second him. I went with Charles Stirling one way;

Tod and Harry Dene went another—leaving the Squire and Mr. Jacobson at the gate, listening for shots, and conferring in whispers with old Jones.

How long we marched about under the bright moonlight, keeping under the shade of the trees and hedges, I cannot tell you; but when we all four met at Dyke Neck, which lay between the Manor and the Court, we had seen nothing. Mr. Stirling went straight home then, but we continued our ramblings. A schoolboy's ardour is not quickly damped.

Beating about fresh ground together for a little while, we then separated. I went across towards the village: the other two elsewhere. It was one of the loveliest of nights, the full moon bright as day, the air warm and soft. But I neither saw nor heard signs of any poachers, and I began to suspect that somebody had played a trick on the old constable.

I turned short back at the thought, and made, as the Americans say, tracks for home. My nearest way was through the dense grove of trees at the back of Caramel Farm, and I took it, though it was not the liveliest way by any means.

But no sooner was I beyond the grove than sounds struck on my ear in the stillness of the night. They seemed to come from the direction of Caramel Cottage. Darting under the side hedge, and then across the side lane, and so under the hedge again that bound the cottage, I stole on the grass, as softly as a mouse. Poachers could not be at work there; but an idea flashed across me that somebody had got into Mr. Barbary's well-stocked garden, and was robbing it.

Peering through the hedge, I saw Barbary himself. He was coming out of the brewhouse, dragging behind him, with two cords, a huge sack of some kind, well-filled and heavy. Opposite the open door, on the furnace, shone a lighted horn lantern. Mr. Barbary pushed-to the door behind him, thereby shutting out the light, dragged his burden over the yard to the garden, and let it fall into what looked like—a freshly-dug grave.

Astonishment kept me intensely still. What did it all mean? Hardly daring to breathe, I stole in at the gate and under the shade of the hedge. Whatever it might contain, that sacking lay perfectly quiet, and Mr. Barbary began to shovel in the spadefuls of earth upon it, as one does upon a coffin.

This was nothing for me to interfere with, and I went away silently. It looked like a mystery, and a dark one; any way it was being done in secret in the witching hours of the night. What the time might be I knew not, the Squire having ordered our watches taken off before starting: perhaps one, or two, or three o'clock.

Tod and Harry Dene reached the gate of Dyke Manor just as I did; and we were greeted, all three, with a storm of reproaches by the Squire and Mr. Jacobson. What did we mean by it?—scamper

ing off like that for hours?—for *hours!*—Three times had the gig been brought out and put up again! Harry was bundled headforemost into the gig, and Mr. Jacobson drove off.

And it turned out that my suspicion touching old Jones was right. Some young men had played the trick upon him. I need not have mentioned it at all, but for seeing what I did see in Barbary's garden.

How Katrine Barbary passed that night you have seen: for, like many another story-teller, I have had to carry you back a few hours. Shivering and shaking, now hot, now cold, she lay, striving to reason with herself that *it could not be;* that so dreadful a thing was not possible; that she was the most wicked girl on earth for imagining it: and she strove in vain. All the events of the past day or two kept crowding into her mind one upon another in flaring colours, like the figures in some hideous phantasmagoria. The unexpected arrival of the bank-notes for Mr. Reste; her father's covetous look at them and his dreadful joke; their going out together that night poaching; their quarrelling together the next morning; their worse quarrelling at night, and their dashing out to the yard (as if in passion) one after the other. And, so far as Katrine could trace it, that was the very last seen or heard of Edgar Reste. The next morning he was gone; gone in a mysterious manner, leaving all his possessions behind him. Her father was reticent over it; would not explain. Then came the little episode of the locked-up brewhouse, which had never been locked before in Joan's memory. Mr. Barbary refused to unlock it, said he had put some wine there; told Joan she must do without the jack. What had really been hidden in that brewhouse? Katrine felt faint at the thought. *Not wine.* And the terrible farce of packing Mr. Reste's effects and addressing them to Euston Square Station, London! Would they lie there for ever—unclaimed? Alas, alas! The proofs were only too palpable. Edgar Reste had been put out of the world for ever. She had been the shivering witness to his secret burial.

"What's the matter, Katrine? Are you ill?"

The inquiry was made by Mr. Barbary next day at breakfast. Sick unto death she looked. The very bright night had given place to a showery morning, and the rain pattered against the window-panes.

"I have a headache," answered Katrine faintly.

"Better send Joan to the Manor to say you cannot attend to-day."

"Oh, I would rather go; I must go," she said hastily. For this good girl had been schooling herself as well as she knew how; making up her mind to persevere in fulfilling the daily duties of her life in the best way she should be able; lest, if she fell short abruptly, suspicion might turn towards her father. She had wildly prayed heaven to grant her strength and help to bear up on her course. Not from her must come the pointing finger of discovery. It is true that he—Edgar—was her first and dearest love; she should

never love another as she had loved him; but she was her father's child, and held him sacred.

"Why must you go?" demanded Mr. Barbary, as, having finished a plate of broiled mushrooms, he began upon a couple of eggs with an appetite that the night's work did not seem to have spoiled.

"The air—the walk—may do me good."

"Well, you know best, child. I suppose Todhetley will be off to Evesham after that dog of theirs," Mr. Barbary went on to remark. "Master Dick Standish must be a bold sinner to steal the dog one day and parade the open streets with it the next! If——What is it now, Joan?"

For old Joan had come in with a face of surprise. "Master," she cried, "has Tom Noah been at work here this morning?"

"Not that I know of," replied Mr. Barbary. Tom Noah, an industrious young fellow, son to Noah, the gardener, was occasionally employed by Mr. Barbary to clean up the yard and clear the garden of its superfluous rubbish.

"Our back'us has been scrubbed out this morning, sir," went on Joan, still in astonishment. "And it didn't want it. Who in the world can have come in and gone and done it?"

"Nonsense," said Mr. Barbary.

"But it has, master; scrubbed clean; the flags are all wet still. And the rain-water barrel's a'most empty, nearly every drop of water drawn out of it! I'd not say but the yard has had a bit of a scrubbing, too, near the garden, as well as the back'us."

"Nonsense!" repeated Mr. Barbary, his light tone becoming irritable. "You see it has been raining! the rain has drifted into the brewhouse, that's all; I left the door open last night. There! go back to your work."

Joan was a simple-natured woman, but she was neither silly nor blind, and she knew that what she said was true. Rapidly turning the matter over in her mind, she came to the conclusion that Tom Noah had been in "unbeknown to the master," and so left the subject.

"I suppose I may take out the spare jack now, sir?" she waited to say.

"Take out anything you like," replied Mr. Barbary.

Afraid of her tell-tale face, Katrine had moved to the window, apparently to look at the weather. Too well she knew who had scrubbed out the place, and why.

The rain had ceased when she set off on her short walk—for it was not much more than a stone's throw to the Manor; the sun was struggling from behind the clouds, blue sky could be seen. Alone with herself and the open country, Katrine gave vent to her pent-up spirit, which she had not dared to do indoors; sighs of anguish and of pain escaped her; she wondered whether it would be wrong if she prayed to die. But someone was advancing to meet her, and she composed her countenance.

It was Ben Gibbon. For the past week or so, since Katrine had been enlightened as to her father's poaching propensities, she had somehow feared this man. He was son to the late James Gibbon, the former gamekeeper at Chavasse Grange, and brother to the present keeper, Richard. Of course one might expect that Mr. Benjamin would protect game and gamekeepers; instead of which, he was known to do a little safe poaching on his own account, and to be an idle fellow altogether. Katrine did not like his intimacy with her father, and she could not forget that he had passed part of that fatal evening with him and Edgar Reste.

"Showery weather to-day, miss," was Ben Gibbon's salutation.

"Yes, it is," answered Katrine, with intense civility—for how could she tell what the man might know?

"I suppose I shall find Mr. Barbary at home?"

"Oh, yes," faintly spoke she, and passed on her way.

II.

We started for Evesham under a sharp shower, the Squire driving Bob and Blister in the large phaeton. Tod sat with him, I and the groom behind. Not a shadow of doubt lay on any one of us that we should bring back Don in triumph—leaving Dick Standish to be dealt with according to his merits. But, as the Squire remarked later, we were not a match for Dick in cunning.

"Keep your eyes open, lads," the Squire said to us as we approached the town. "And if you see Dick Standish, with or without the dog, jump out and pounce upon him. You hear, Giles?"

"No need to tell me to do it, sir," answered Giles humbly, clenching his fists; he had been eating humble pie ever since Tuesday night. "I am ready."

But Dick Standish was not seen. Leaving the carriage and Giles at the inn, we made our way to the police station. An officer named Brett attended to us. It was curious enough, but the first person we saw inside the station was Tobias Jellico, who had called in on some matter of business that concerned his shop.

"We had your message yesterday, sir," said Brett to the Squire, "and we lost no time in seeing after Standish. But it is not your dog that he has with him."

"Not my dog!" repeated the Squire, up in arms at once. "Don't tell me that, Brett. Whose dog should it be but mine? Come!"

"Well, sir, I never saw your dog; but Tomkins, one of our men, who has often been on duty at Church Dykely, knows it well," rejoined Brett. "We had Standish and the dog up here, and Tomkins at once said it was not your dog at all, so we let the man go. Mr. Jellico also says it is not yours; I was talking to him about it now."

"What I said was this," put in Jellico, stepping forward, and speaking with meek deprecation. "If Squire Todhetley's dog has been

described to me correctly, the dog I saw with Standish yesterday can't be the same. It is a great big ugly dog, with tan marks about his white coat ——"

"Ugly!" retorted the Squire, resenting the aspersion, for he fully believed it to be Don.

"It is not at all an ugly dog, it's a handsome dog," spoke up Brett. "Perhaps Mr. Jellico does not like dogs."

"Not much," confessed Jellico.

"How came you to say yesterday at Church Dykely that it was the same dog?" Tod asked the man.

"If you please, sir, I didn't exactly say it was; I said I made no doubt of it," returned Jellico, mild as new milk. "It was in this way: Perkins the butcher was standing at his shop door as I passed down the street. We began talking, and he told me about the poachers having been out on the Tuesday night, and that Squire Todhetley had lost his fine Newfoundland dog; he said it was thought the Standishes were in both games. So then I said I had met Dick Standish with just such a dog that morning as I was a coming out of Evesham. I had never seen the Squire's dog, you perceive, gentlemen; but neither Mr. Perkins nor me had any doubt it was his."

"And it must be mine," said the Squire hotly. "Send for the dog, Brett; I will see it. Send for Standish also."

"I'll send, sir," replied Brett, rather dubiously, "and get the man here if he is to be had. The chances are that, with all this bother, Standish has left the town and taken the dog with him."

Brett was a talkative man, with a mottled face and sandy hair. He despatched a messenger to see after Standish. Jellico went out at the same time, telling Brett that his business could wait till another day.

"I know it is my dog," affirmed the Squire to Brett while he waited. Nothing on earth, except actual sight, would have convinced him that it was not his. "Those loose men play all sorts of cunning tricks. Dick Standish is full of them. I shouldn't wonder but he has *painted* the dog; done his black marks over with brown paint—or *green*."

"We've a dyer in this town, Squire," related Brett; "he owns a little white curly dog and he dyes him as an advertisement for his colours, and lets him run about on the pavement before the shop door. To-day the dog will be (say) a delicate sky-blue, to-morrow a flaming scarlet; the next day he'll be a beautiful orange, with a green tail. The neighbours' dogs collect round and stand looking at him from a respectful distance, uncertain, I suppose, whether he is of the dog species, or not."

I laughed.

"Passing the shop the other day, I saw the dog sitting on the door-step," ran on Brett. "He was bright purple that time. An old lady, driving by in her chariot, caught sight of the dog and called to the coachman to pull up. There she sat, that old lady, entranced

with amazement, staring through her eye-glass at what she took to be a phenomenon in nature. Five minutes, full, she stared, and couldn't tear herself away. It is true, gentlemen, I assure you."

Mr. Dick Standish was found, and brought before us. He looked rather more disreputable than usual, his old fustian coat out at elbows, a spotted red handkerchief twisted loosely round his neck. The dog was with him, *and it was not ours.* A large, fine dog, as already described, though much less handsome than Don, and out of condition, his curly coat a yellowish white, the marks on it of real tan colour, not painted.

Dick's account, after vehemently protesting he had nothing to do with the poaching affair on Tuesday night, was never for a minute out of his bed—was this: The dog belonged to one of the stable-helpers at Leet Hall; but the man had determined to have the dog shot, not being satisfied with him of late, for the animal had turned odd and uncertain in his behaviour. Dick Standish heard of this. Understanding dogs thoroughly, and believing that this dog only wanted a certain course of treatment to put him right, Standish walked to Church Leet on Wednesday morning last from Church Dykely, and asked the man, Brazer, to give him the dog—he would take him and run all risks. Brazer refused at first; but, after a bit, he agreed to let Standish keep the dog for a time. If he cured the dog, Brazer was to have him back again, paying Standish for his keep and care; but if not satisfied with the dog, Standish might keep him for good. Standish brought the dog away, and took him straight to Evesham, walking the whole way and getting there about nine o'clock in the evening. He was doctoring the dog well, and hoped to cure him.

Whether this tale was true or whether it wasn't, none of us could contradict it. But there was an appearance of fear, of shuffling in the man's manner, which seemed to indicate that something lay behind.

"It's every word gospel, ain't it, Rove, and no lie nowhere," cried Standish, bending to pat the dog, while the corner of his eye was turned to regard the aspect of the company. "You've blown me up for many things before now, Squire Todhetley, but there's no call, sir, to accuse me this time."

"When did you hear about this dog of Brazer's, and who told you of it?" enquired Tod, in his haughty way.

"'Twas Bill Rimmer, sir; he telled me on Tuesday night," replied Dick. "And I said to him what a shame it was to talk of destroying that there fine dog, and that Brazer was a soft for thinking on't. And I said, young Mr. Todhetley, that I'd be over at Church Leet first thing the next morning, to see if he'd give the dog to me."

"It is not my dog, I see that," spoke the Squire, breaking the silence that followed Dick's speech, "and it may be the stableman's at Leet Hall; that's a thing readily ascertained. Do you know where my dog is, Dick Standish?"

"No, I don't know, sir," replied the man in a very eager tone;

"and I never knowed at all, till fetched to this police station yesterday, that your dog was a missing. I'll swear I didn't."

There was nothing more to be done, but to accept the failure, and leave the station, after privately charging the police to keep an eye on clever Mr. Dick Standish, his haunts, and his movements.

In the afternoon we drove back home, not best pleased with the day's work. A sense of having been *done*, in some way or other not at present explicable, lay on most of us.

It appeared that the groom shared this feeling strongly. In passing through the yard, I came upon him, in his shirt sleeves, seated outside the stable door, on an inverted bucket. His elbows on his knees, and his face in his hands, he looked the image of despair. The picture arrested me. Mack was rubbing down the horses; a duty Giles rarely entrusted to anybody. He was fond of Don, and had been ready to hang himself ever since Tuesday night.

"Why, Giles! what's the matter?"

"Matter enough, Master Johnny, when a false villyan like that Dick Standish can take the master, and the police theirselves, and everybody else, in!" was his answer. "I felt as cock-sure, sir, that we should bring home Don as I am that the sky above us is shining out blue after the last shower."

"But it was not Don, you see, Giles."

"*He* wasn't; the dog Standish had to show," returned Giles, with a peculiar emphasis. "Dick had got up his tale all smooth and sleek, sir."

"How do you know he had?"

"Because he told it me over again—the one he said he had been telling at the police station, Master Johnny. I was standing outside the inn yard while you were all in at lunch, and Standish came by as bold as brass, Brazer's dog, Rover, leashed to his hand."

"I suppose it is Brazer's dog?"

"Oh, it's Brazer's dog, that'un be," said Giles, with a deep amount of scorn; "I know *him* well enough."

"Then how can it be Don? And we could not bring home another man's dog."

Giles paused. His eyes had a far-off look in them, as if seeking for something they could not find.

"Master Johnny," he said, "I can't rightly grasp things. All the way home I've been trying to put two-and-two together, I am trying at it still, and I can't do it anyhow. Don't it seem odd to you, sir, that Standish should have got Brazer's dog, Rover, into his hands just at the very time we are suspecting he has got Don into 'em?"

I did not know. I had not thought about it.

"He has that dog of Brazer's as a blind. A blind, and nothing else, sir. He has captured our dog, safe and sure, and is keeping him hid up somewhere till the first storm of the search is over, when he'll be able to dispose of him safely."

I could not see Giles's drift, or how the one dog could help to conceal the possession of the other.

"Well, sir, I can't explain it better," he answered; "I can't fit the pieces of the puzzle into one another in my mind *yet.* But I am positive it is so. Dick Standish has made up the farce about Brazer's dog and got him into his hands to throw dust in our eyes and keep us off the scent of Don."

I began to see the groom might be right; and that the Standishes, sly and crafty, were keeping Don in hiding.

Mrs. Todhetley had met us with a face of concern. Lena's throat was becoming very bad indeed, and Mr. Duffham did not like the look of it at all. He had already come twice that day.

"I think, Johnny," said the mother to me, "that we had better stop Miss Barbary's coming to morrow; Mr. Duffham does not know but the malady may be getting infectious. Suppose you go now to the cottage and tell her." So I went off to do so, and found her ill. On this same Friday afternoon, having occasion to ask some question of her father, who was in the garden, she found him planting greens on the plot of ground—the *grave*—under the summer-apple tree. Before she could speak, a shudder of terror seized her; she trembled from head to foot, turned back to the kitchen, and sat down on the nearest chair.

Old Joan pronounced it to be an attack of ague; Miss Katrine, she said, must have taken a chill. Perhaps she had. It was just then that I arrived and found her shivering in the kitchen. Joan ran up to her room in the garret to bring down some powder she kept there, said to be a grand remedy for ague.

It was getting dusk then; the sun had set. To me, Katrine seemed to be shaking with terror, not illness. Mr. Barbary, in full view of the window, was planting the winter greens under the summer-apple tree.

"What is it that you are frightened at?" I said, propping my back against the kitchen mantelpiece.

"I *must* ask you a question, Johnny Ludlow," she whispered, panting and shivering. "Was it you who came and stood inside the gate there in the middle of last night?"

"Yes it was. And I saw what Mr. Barbary was doing—*there.* I could not make it out."

Katrine left her chair and placed herself before me. Clasping her piteous hands, she besought me to be silent; to keep the secret for pity sake—to be *true.* All kinds of odd ideas stole across me. I would not listen to them; only promised her that I would tell nothing, would be true for ever and a day.

"It must have been an accident, you know," she pleaded; "it must have been an accident."

Joan came back, and I took my departure. What on earth could Katrine have meant? All kinds of fancies were troubling my brain,

fit only for what in these later days are called the penny dreadfuls, and I did my best to drive them out of it.

The next morning Katrine was really ill. Her throat was parched, her body ached with fever. As to Lena, she was worse; and we, who ought to have gone back to school that day, were kept at home lest we should carry with us any infection.

"All right," said Tod. "It's an ill wind that blows nobody good." He did not believe in the infection; told me in private that Duffham was an old woman.

Can any one picture, I wonder, Katrine Barbary's distress of mind, the terrible dread that had taken possession of it? Shuddering dread, amounting to a panic: dread of the deed itself, dread for her father, dread of discovery.

On the following morning, Sunday, a letter was delivered at Caramel Cottage for Mr. Reste, the postmark being London, the writing in the same hand as the last—Captain Amphlett's. Mr. Barbary took it away to his gun-room; Katrine saw it, later in the day, lying on the deal-table there, unopened.

The next Thursday afternoon, Lena being then almost well—for children are dying to-day and running about again to-morrow—I called at the Cottage to ask after Katrine. We heard she had an attack of fever. The weather was lovely again; the October sky blue as in summer, the sun hot and bright.

Well, she did look ill! She sat in the parlour at the open window, a huge shawl on, and her poor face about half the size it was before. What had it been, I asked, and she said ague; but she was much better now and intended to be at the Manor again on Monday.

"Sit down please, Johnny. I suppose Lena has been glad of the holiday."

"She just has. That young lady believes French was invented for her especial torment. Have you heard from Mr. Reste, Katrine? ——what does he say about his impromptu flitting?"

She turned white as a ghost, never answering, looking at me strangely. I thought a spasm must have taken her.

"Not yet," she faintly said. "Papa thinks—thinks he may have gone abroad."

While I was digesting the words, some vehicle was heard rattling up the side lane; it turned the corner and stopped at the gate. "Why, Katrine," I said, "it is a railway fly from Evesham!"

A little fair man in a grey travelling suit got out of the fly, came up the path, and knocked at the door. Old Joan answered it and showed him into the room. "Captain Amphlett," she said. Katrine looked ready to die.

"I must apologise for intruding," he began, with a pleasant voice and manner. "My friend Edgar Reste is staying here, I believe."

Katrine was taken with a shivering fit. The stranger looked at her with curiosity. I said she had been ill with ague, and was about to

add that Edgar Reste had left, when Mr. Barbary came in. Captain Amphlett turned to him and went on to explain: he was on his way to spend a little time in one of the Midland shires, and had halted at Evesham for the purpose of looking up Edgar Reste—from whom he had been expecting to hear more than a week past; could not understand why he did not. Mr. Barbary, with all the courtesy of the finished gentleman, told him, in reply to this, that Edgar Reste had left Caramel Cottage a week ago.

"Dear me!" cried the stranger, evidently surprised. "And without writing to tell me. Was his departure unexpected?"

Mr. Barbary laughed lightly. That man would have retained his calmest presence of mind when going down in a wreck at sea. "Some matter of business called him away, I fancy," he replied.

"And to what part of England was he going?" asked Captain Amphlett, after a pause. "Did he say?"

Mr. Barbary appeared to have an impulsive answer on his lips, but closed them before he could speak it. He glanced at me, and then turned his head and glanced at Katrine, as if to see whether she was there, for he was sitting with his back to her. A thought struck me that we were in the way of his open speech.

"He went to London," said Mr. Barbary.

"To London!" echoed the Captain. "Why, that's strange. He has not come to London, I assure you."

"I can assure you it is where he told me he was going," said Mr. Barbary, smiling. "And it was to London his luggage was addressed."

"Well, it is altogether strange," repeated Captain Amphlett. "I went to his chambers in the Temple yesterday, and Farnham, the barrister who shares them with him, told me Reste was still in Worcestershire; he had not heard from him for some time, and supposed he might be returning any day now. Where in the world can he be hiding himself? Had he come to London, as you suppose, Mr. Barbary, he would have sought me out the first thing."

Whiter than any ghost ever seen or heard of, had grown Katrine as she listened. I could not take my eyes from her terrified face.

"I do not comprehend it," resumed Captain Amphlett, looking more helpless than a rudderless ship at sea. "Are you sure, sir, that there is no mistake; that he was really going to London?"

"Not at all sure; only that he said it," returned Mr. Barbary in a half mocking tone. "One does not enquire too closely, you know, into the private affairs of young men. We have not heard from him yet."

"I cannot understand it at all," persisted Captain Amphlett; "or why he has not written to me; or where he can have got to. He ought to have written."

"Ah, yes, no doubt," suavely remarked Mr. Barbary. "He was careless about letter-writing, I fancy. Can I offer you any refreshment?"

"None at all, thank you; I have no time to spare," said the other, rising to depart. "I suppose you do not chance to know whether Reste had a letter from me last Tuesday week?"

"Yes, he had one. It had some bank notes in it. He opened it here at the breakfast table."

Quite a relief passed over Captain Amphlett's perplexed face at the answer. "I am glad to hear you say that, Mr. Barbary. By his not acknowledging receipt of the money, I feared it had miscarried."

Bidding us good afternoon, and telling Katrine (at whose sick state he had continued to glance curiously) that he wished her better, the stranger walked rapidly out to his fly, attended by Mr. Barbary.

"Katrine," I asked, preparing to take my own departure, "what was there in that gentleman to frighten you?"

"It—it was the ague," she answered, bringing out the words with a jerk.

"Oh—ague! Well, I'd get rid of such an ague as that. Good bye."

But it was not ague; it was sheer fear, as common sense told me, and I did not care to speculate upon it. An uneasy atmosphere seemed to be hanging over Caramel Cottage altogether; to have set in with Edgar Reste's departure.

A day or two later our people departed for Crabb Cot for change of air for Lena, and we returned to school, so that nothing more was seen or heard at present of the Barbarys.

III.

December weather, and snow on the ground, and Caramel Cottage looking cold and cheerless. Not so cheerless, though, as poor Katrine, who had a blue, pinched face and a bad cough.

"I can't get her to rouse herself, or to swallow hardly a morsel of food," lamented Joan to Mr. Duffham. "She sits like a statty all day long, sir, with her hands before her."

"Sits like a statue, does she," returned Duffham, who could see it for himself, and for the hundredth time wondered what it was she had upon her mind. He did his best, no doubt, in the shape of tonics and lectures, but he could make nothing of his patient. Katrine vehemently denied that she was worrying herself over any sweetheart—for that's how Duffham delicately shaped his questions—and said it was the cold weather.

"The voyage will set her up, or—*break* her up," decided Duffham, who had never treated so unsatisfactory an invalid. "As to not having anything on her mind, why she may tell that to the moon."

Katrine was just dying of the trouble. The consciousness of what the garden could disclose filled her with horror, while the fear of discovery haunted her steps by day and her dreams by night. She could not sleep alone, and Joan had brought her mattress down to the room and lay on the floor. When the sun shone, Mr. Barbary would

compel her to sit or walk in the garden; Katrine would turn sick and faint at sight of that plot of ground under the apple-tree and the winter greens growing there. At moments she thought her father must suspect the source of her illness; but he gave no sign of it. Since Captain Amphlett's visit, no further enquiry had been made after Edgar Reste. Katrine lived in daily dread of it. Now and then the neighbours would ask after him. Duffham had said one day in the course of conversation: "Where's that young Reste now?" "Oh, in London, working on for his silk gown," Mr. Barbary lightly answered. Katrine marvelled at his coolness.

Upon getting back to the Manor for Christmas we heard that Mr. Barbary was quitting Church Dykely for Canada. "And the voyage will either kill or cure the child," said Duffham, for it was he who gave us the news; "she is in a frightfully weak state."

"Is it ague still?" asked Mrs. Todhetley.

"It is more like nerves than ague," answered Duffham. "She seems to live in a chronic state of fear, starting and shrinking at every unexpected sound. I can't make her out, and that's the truth; she denies having received any shock.—So you have never found Don, Squire!" he broke off, leaving the other subject.

"No," said the Squire angrily. "Dick Standish has been too much for us this time. The fellow wants hanging. Give him rope enough, and he'll do it."

Brazer's dog was returned to him, safe and sound, but our dog had never come back to us, and the Squire was looking out for another. Dick Standish protested his innocence yet; but he had gone roving the country with that other dog, and no doubt had sold Don to somebody at a safe distance. Perhaps had dyed him a fine gold first, as the dyer dyed his dog at Evesham.

"Now, Miss Katrine, there's not a bit of sense in it!"

It was Christmas Eve. Katrine was sitting at dusk by the parlour fire, and Joan was scolding. She had brought in a tray of tea with some bread-and-butter; Katrine was glad enough of the tea, but said she could not eat; she always said so now.

"Be whipped if I can tell what has got into the child!" stormed Joan. "Do you want to starve yourself right out?—do you want to ——"

"There's papa," interrupted Katrine, as the house door was heard to open. "You must bring in more tea now, Joan."

This door opened next, and someone stood looking in. Not Mr. Barbary. Katrine gazed with dilating eyes, as the fire-light flickered on the intruder's face; and then she seized hold of Joan with an awful cry. For he who had come in bore the semblance of Edgar Reste.

"Why, Katrine, my dear, have you been ill?"

Katrine burst into hysterical tears as her terror passed. She had

been taking it for Mr. Reste's apparition, you see, whereas it was Mr. Reste himself. Joan closed the shutters, stirred the fire, and went away to see what she could do for him in the shape of eatables after his journey. He sat down by Katrine, and took her poor wan face to his sheltering arms.

In the sobbing excitement of the moment, in the strangely wonderful relief his presence brought, Katrine breathed forth the truth ; that she had seen him, as she believed, *buried* under the summer-apple tree ; had believed it all this time, and that it had been slowly killing her. Mr. Reste laughed a little at the idea of his being buried, and cleared up matters in a few brief words.

"But why did you never write?" she asked.

"Being at issue with Mr. Barbary, I would not write to him ; and I thought, Katrine, that the less you were reminded of me the better. I waited in London until my luggage came up, and then went straight to Dieppe, without having seen anybody I knew ; without having even shown myself at my Chambers ——"

"But why not, Edgar?" she interrupted. Mr. Reste laughed.

"Well, I had reasons. I had left a few outstanding accounts there, and was not then prepared to pay them, and I did not care to give a clue to my address to be bothered with letters."

"You did not even write to Captain Amphlett. He came here to see after you."

"I wrote to him from Dieppe ; not quite at first, though. Buried under the apple-tree ! that *is* a joke, Katrine !"

It was Christmas Eve, I have said. We had gone through the snow, with Mrs. Todhetley, to help the Miss Pages decorate the church, and the Squire was alone after dinner, when Mr. Reste was shown in.

"Is it you !" cried the Squire in hearty welcome. "So you have come down for Christmas !"

"Partly for that," answered Mr. Reste. "Partly, sir, to see you."

"To see me ! You are very good. I hope you'll dine with us to-morrow, if Barbary will spare you."

"Ah ! I don't know about that ; I'm afraid not. Anyway, I have a tale to tell you first."

Sitting on the other side the fire, opposite the Squire, the wine and walnuts on the table between them, he told the tale of that past Tuesday night.

He had gone out with Barbary in a fit of foolishness, not intending to do any harm to the game or to join in any harm, though Barbary had insisted on his carrying a loaded gun. The moon was remarkably bright. Not long had they been out, going cautiously, when on drawing near Dyke Neck, they became aware that some poachers were already abroad, and that the keepers were tracking them ; so there was nothing for it but to steal back again. They had nearly reached Caramel Cottage, and were making for the side gate, when a huge

dog flew up, barking. Barbary called out that it was the Squire's dog, and ——

"Bless me!" interjected the Squire at this.

"Yes, sir, your dog, Don," continued Mr. Reste. "Barbary very foolishly kicked the dog: he was in a panic, you see, lest the noise of its barking should bring up the keepers. That kick must have enraged Don, and he fastened savagely on Barbary's leg. I, fearing for Barbary's life, or some lesser injury, grew excited, and fired at the dog. It killed him."

The Squire drew a deep breath.

"Not daring to leave the dog at the gate, for it might have betrayed us, we drew him across the yard to the brewhouse, and locked the door upon him. But while doing this, Ben Gibbon passed, and thereby learnt what had happened. The next day, Barbary and I had some bickering together. I wanted to come to you and confess the truth openly; Barbary forbade it, saying it would ruin him: we could bury the dog that night or the next, he said, and nobody would ever be the wiser. In the evening, Gibbon came in; he was all for Barbary's opinion, and opposed mine. After he left, I and Barbary had a serious quarrel. I said I would leave there and then; he resented it, and followed me into the yard to try to keep me. But my temper was up, and I set off to walk to Evesham, telling him to send my traps after me, and to direct them to Euston Square Station. I took the first morning train that passed through Evesham for London, and made my mind up on the journey to go abroad for a week or two. Truth to confess," added the speaker, "I felt a bit of a coward about the dog, not knowing what proceedings you might take if it came to light, and I deemed it as well to be out of the way for a time. But I don't like being a coward, Mr. Todhetley, it is a rôle I have never been used to, and I came down to-day to confess all. Barbary is going away, so it will not damage him: besides, it was really I who killed the dog, not he. And now, sir, I throw myself upon your mercy. What do you say to me?"

"Well, I'm sure I don't know," said the Squire, who was in a rare good humour, and liked the young fellow besides. "It was a bad thing to do—poor faithful Don! But it's Christmas-tide, so I suppose we must say no more about it. Let bygones be begones."

Edgar Reste grasped his hand.

"Barbary's off to Canada, we are told," said the Squire. "A better country for him than this. He has not been thought much of in this place, as you probably know. And it's to be hoped that poor little maiden of his will get up her health again, which seems, by all accounts, to be much shattered."

"I think she'll get that up now," said Mr. Reste, with a curious smile. "She is not going out with him, sir; she stays behind with me."

"With you!" cried the Squire, staring.

"I have just asked her to be my wife, and she says, Yes," said Mr.

Reste. "An old uncle of mine over in India has died; he has left me a few hundreds a year, so that I can afford to marry."

"I'm sure I am glad to hear it," said the Squire, heartily. "Poor Don, though! And what did Barbary do with him?"

"Buried him in his back garden, under the summer-apple tree."

Coming home from our night's work at this juncture, we found, to our surprise, a great dog fastened to the strong iron garden bench.

"What a magnificent dog!" exclaimed Tod, while the mother sprang back in alarm. "It is something like Don."

It was very much like Don. Quite as large, and handsomer.

"I shall take it in, Johnny; the Pater would like to see it. There, mother, you go in first."

Tod unfastened the dog and took it into the dining room, where sat Mr. Reste. The dog seemed a gentle creature, and went about looking at us all with his intelligent eyes. Mrs. Todhetley stroked him.

"Well, that is a nice dog!" cried the Squire. "Whose is it, lads?"

"It is yours, sir, if you will accept him from me," said Mr. Reste. "I came across him in London the other day, and thought you might like him in place of Don. I have taught him to answer to the same name."

"We'll call him 'Don the Second'—and I thank you heartily," said the Squire, with a beaming face. "Good Don! Good old fellow! You shall be made much of."

And that's the ending. He married Katrine without much delay, taking her off to London to be nursed up; and Mr. Barbary set sail for Canada. The bank notes, you ask about? Why, what Katrine saw in her father's hands were but *half* the notes, for Mr. Reste divided them the day they arrived, giving thirty pounds to his host, and keeping thirty himself. And Dick Standish, for once, had not been in the fight; and the Squire, meeting him in the turnip-field on Christmas Day, gave him five shillings for a Christmas-box. Which elated Dick beyond telling; and the Squire was glad of it later, when poor Dick had gone away prematurely to the Better Land.

And all the sympathy Katrine had from her father, when he came to hear about the summer-apple tree, was a sharp wish that she could have had her ridiculous ideas shaken out of her.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

AMONG THE WELSH.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "The Cruise of the Reserve Squadron," &c. &c.

Near Capel Curig.

IN our last paper we sang the praises of Conway and of its ancient castle, and no one who has rambled amidst those ruins and gazed upon the far stretching view from the battlemented towers, will think the praise misplaced. On the contrary; whole pages might be devoted to descriptions, and yet there should not be found a sentence too much, a charm too coloured. It is impossible to overdraw the beauties of nature, or the effect upon the imagination of an ancient and romantic ruin bearing all the marks of former greatness, almost stamped with its own history, and loaded with the beauties of time and decay.

In the present paper I do not know that there will be any old ruin to rhapsodise over, though the pen has a bad habit of rambling whither it listeth, and it is difficult to see the end from the beginning. But one thing is certain; we shall not meet again in these pages with a castle at all to be compared with that of Conway. Thus it was fitting to do homage to it: even to the bringing it again and again, if need be, before the mind's eye, as the gem of ruins in North Wales, a pearl in a perfect setting, an apple of gold in a picture of silver.

Starting from Llandudno Junction, which lies almost at the foot of Conway Castle, our back turned upon that pleasant watering-place,

the train takes us up the valley of the Conway, towards that paradise of artists, Bettws-y-Coed.

On the right is the estuary of the sea, looking at high water so much like a lake surrounded by low-lying, undulating hills: the hills of Carnarvonshire. The valley narrows as the train goes on its way. The river Conway flows calmly. In summer time, tide permitting, a small steamer plies up the river, as far as Trefriw, and it must be a very pleasant way of seeing one of the loveliest valleys in Wales, whose praises have been sung by poets and recorded unnumbered times on canvas. Certainly it forms one of the most interesting of the Welsh railway journeys: this and the portion of line between Rhyl and Llandudno Junction, where you pass Colwyn Bay.

The latter is, indeed, a very charming spot. The bay curves round, and the sea rolls gently up over the pure white sand of the beach. In the background are hills green and fertile, and narrow passes that seem to promise walks and climbs rich in beauty and interest; whilst small dells that are almost miniature ravines come down almost to the very rails. In spring, I was told, they are gemmed with a wealth of ferns and wild flowers that would supply half Christendom. A fertile valley or plain lies between the sea and the hills, warm and sheltered in winter. No wonder, then, that Colwyn Bay is becoming a winter resort. Nor is it difficult to believe that it has a future before it, and in a few years will probably have sprung into a place of consideration. Overlooking the sea was a large hotel, which looked comfortable, well appointed and inviting. Nothing, it seemed, as the train went round the bay, could be pleasanter than its situation. Sheltered by hills in the background, it stood almost on the white sand of the beach, that sparkling in the sunshine, was almost washed by the sea, that, to-day, was, broad, blue and shimmering. Above, was a sky that must be warm and blue and sunny even in wintry weather. Almost, one was tempted to stop and take up one's abode here, and lie all day, and day after day, upon that white sand, and bask in the sunshine, and listen to the plash of the inrolling tide, with a favourite book to turn to when weary of one's own thoughts. What luxury this; and even though alone, how opposite to solitude. Who could not be happy under such circumstances?

But to leave Colwyn Bay and return to the Conway Valley. A very different scene this, for here there is no sea. But we have water in the shape of a broad, flowing river. A stately and majestic flow, without suspicion of falls or cataracts, or any of the more turbulent elements of river life.

The surrounding hills are fertile and often richly wooded. the fields black cattle are grazing, mixed with a good deal of cattle that are not black. There are farms here and there, apparently prosperous, if one may judge by the barns that are no doubt filled with plenty, and the well-made hay-ricks whose substance is visible.

On the slopes of the hills were a few houses, and blue smoke went curling upwards amongst the trees, with a picturesque effect which adds so much and so strangely to all scenery.

Here the scene was undoubtedly beautiful and romantic, and seemed to find its culminating point at Llanrwst, the station this side Bettws-y-Coed. You feel that here you are really and truly in Wales, amidst charms of which one has heard so much. Rhyl or Llandudno, when all is said and done, might belong to England or any other country, but up the Conway Valley and at Llanwrst, you are fast becoming decidedly Welsh. If nothing else betrayed the fact, the very names of the stations would tell you that, if not in Siberia or China, you must be in Wales. The extraordinary combination of letters, which allows one vowel to about every twelve consonants, and not always that, can be nothing at all approaching English. But the most startling name was that of a village in Anglesea with fifty-two letters in it and apparently only two vowels amongst them all. I spare the reader the infliction.

So Llanrwst, reposing in a luxuriance of verdure and foliage nothing less than enchanting, we felt was decidedly Welsh. The disposition of the hills and their forms made the spot singularly romantic as well as beautiful. There was space, too, in which to breathe freely. You were not crushed and overweighted by the hills, and all the sky was not eclipsed by them, nor all the sunshine. In this respect, Llanwrst has the advantage over Bettws-y-Coed. With all its reputation, the latter is too cabined, cribbed, confined. You feel that it is lovely, and yet, in a sense, cannot get at the loveliness; cannot see the wood for the trees, or the sky for the hills; and the hills seem to be very much in each other's way. It has scarcely any perspective, look which way you will.

Yet when the train reached Bettws-y-Coed it was impossible not to bow down before this favoured spot. And perhaps from the railway-station you have a finer and freer view than from any other part of the little place.

Bettws-y-Coed is, in its way, an Eden; a bower of roses, where nightingales ought to sing if they do not. On first arriving, you are impressed with the surrounding hills, all independent of each other, and forming, as it were, distinct chains, and which seem to have conspired to shut out Bettws-y-Coed from the world. So secluded is it that one wonders by whom it was first discovered. Undoubtedly by a pair of foolish lovers, who, for the time being, dwelling in a pleasant fools' paradise, were all the world to each other. An Edwin and Angelina, or Abelard and Heloise, or even a more tragically-disposed Romeo and Juliet. Whoever it might be, they discovered a "cool, sequestered glade," though it has long since ceased to be unknown and retired.

The hills are for the most part fertile and luxuriant, with a richness and abundance which is one of the charms of the place. There

are cultivated slopes, and patches of green where cattle are grazing, and fields planted with grain. Houses nestle amidst the trees on the hill sides, almost hidden from sight. Bettws itself is almost unquiet with the sounds of nature. The river runs a rapid and somewhat noisy course, especially when it becomes shallow and lays bare its rocky bed. Trees, overhanging the water, for ever whisper and sway and rustle in the wind. The air seems filled with sound. But it is pleasant and soothing, very distinct from the hum and rush and roar of cities, which fill you with unrest, and make you feel nothing so strongly and so certainly as that there will come a day when we shall put off this mortality and find rest unto our souls. What a laying down of the burden; what a folding of the hands; what a long-drawn sigh will loose the silver cord.

The village of Bettws-y-Coed consists, chiefly, of one winding street; so winding that you can only see a few houses at a glance, and the place, in consequence, looks even less important than a village. This is, perhaps, an advantage. The road curves, and the houses are built under the very shadow of the hills, and often, in winter, must see little sunshine. Yet, said the landlord of the hotel, it was warm, and roses bloom all the year round. Damp, also, it certainly must be in wet weather, when, to the other sounds of nature, is added the monotonous and melancholy drip, drop from the trees, from which there is no escape.

The post office, a sort of "all-at-once" shop, dealt in many things; but the manner of the young woman who served was so unpleasant that one entered only under compulsion, and left with despatch. In Wales, almost more than any other place or country I know, one meets with the two extremes: a rough, rude manner, very ignorant and forbidding, or a politeness and civility that raises its possessors above the ordinary level of their kind. Perhaps, at Bettws-y-Coed the relaxing air affected the post office damsel—for the air is certainly relaxing, and to some temperaments must be trying. Or possibly she was overworked—a state of things quite as trying to the nerves and temper as a warm, soft atmosphere.

Nevertheless, it is an excellent spot for a sojourn of some days, and may be made a starting point for many excursions. In summer four or five coaches start every day for different parts of the neighbourhood, and by their aid all its beauties may best be seen. There is capital fishing in the streams, and an artist might almost take up his abode here and, at the end of a long life, scarcely have exhausted his subjects.

One of my first impressions, indeed, of Bettws-y-Coed was a camp stool, an artist, and the inevitable white umbrella, the sum-total apparently disporting itself in the very middle of the river. But on nearer approach the artist proved to have chosen a less watery resting-place, and on the edge of the bank was carefully transferring to his canvas the reflection of some graceful trees bending over the clear

water, and perhaps, like Narcissus, in love with their own image. They had every right to be so.

It is one of the pleasures of driving in North Wales, that if you hire a conveyance and start betimes, though you must choose your direction, your destination may remain a matter of chance or caprice, may be altered by the turning of a straw. So I found it one morning. The landlord had provided an excellent dogcart — by far the best kind of vehicle for a hilly country when you happen to be alone. The driver, intelligent and thoughtful, differed from most of his class, knew the name and nature of every hill and valley in the neighbourhood, and enlivened the way by sensible remarks and a just appreciation of the scenery.

BETTWS-Y-COED.

Passing the post office, and wondering whether its younger genius was in her customary unfriendly humour (the elder matron was of an opposite temperament and equally civil and obliging), we wound up the hill. The river to the right was sheltered by a wealth of trees, and as we ascended, so it gained in depth, until presently the Swallow Falls were reached. But they are not to be seen from the road; one has to alight and walk a few yards.

I have said that nearly all the waterfalls in Wales were disappointing. It could not be otherwise, with the grand torrents of Norway still fresh in one's memory. Compared with these, the falls of Wales are nothing but miniature cascades, and one feels that they are childish, and you are ridiculous for troubling about them. The Swallow Falls were hardly an exception, and were less effective than usual because there was little water in them. Pretty, certainly, but so is a waterfall

upon a stage ; whilst of grandeur there was none. The water darted hither and thither in endless zigzags over an immense number of rocks and boulders more or less exposed. The falls in their countless channels and uncertain courses resembled the flight of birds, and possibly had suggested their name ; but it was rather the forked flight of the snipe than the more sweeping wing of the swallow.

We went our way through this beautiful vale of Llugwy, for the romantic river rejoices in this very inharmonious name. Mile after mile was passed amidst some of the richest and grandest scenery in North Wales, and soon we had before us the whole Snowdon range of hills. Snowdon itself was cloud-capped, and only once or twice, just for a moment, unveiled its highest peak. Of course one might

OLD MILL, BETTWS-Y-COED.

again draw comparisons between these so-called majestic mountains and those of Norway, but it is unnecessary, and it would be less just. The difference in size between one mountain and another is not so easily carried in the mind's eye, and does not force itself upon the attention. You see a mountain before you, feel that it is great, and are satisfied ; and if that other mountain that is afar off comes to your remembrance, you only feel that it is greater.

After some miles we reached Capel Curig, a small place in the midst of all this grand scenery of mountain, vale, and lake, a paradise for excursionists and fishermen. Then for a time the scene grew less rich and luxuriant, until presently we looked down upon the valley of Nant Frangon, and one of the grandest and most extensive views in Wales. Looked down from a great height upon a wide fertile plain, where in the distance a couple of lakes gleamed like silver streaks. Hills towered on either hand, and at the far end

Snowdon closed-in the vision. On our right were the Glyders, two mountains of granite, more than three thousand feet high, rocky, barren and stern, with steep, precipitous crags that were really grand, and fitly guard the entrance to the Pass of Llanberis, the wildest, most rocky, and, if the term be not too exaggerated, most sublime pass in Wales. Turning to the right, near a solitary house, now closed for the season but generally crowded in summer with tourists on pleasure bent, we left behind us that splendid view into the valley, which made one almost feel like gazing down upon a far-off and very lovely garden-world, and commenced a descent which continued for five long uninterrupted miles.

Nothing but a series of rocky, towering granite hills from beginning to end. Frequently the sides were smooth, and almost perpendicular. Here and there small cascades oozed down from the summits, to be lost before they reached the bottom. The bed of the valley was strewn with immense fragments of rock that in falling must have shaken the very foundations of the pass itself. Other great boulders hung apparently by a thread and seemed on the very instant of separating. In one or two places, by the peculiar look of the stone might be traced the action of ancient glaciers, but of which all other signs have long since disappeared.

The rocky hills on the left were more sloping, and fell further back from the road; and on small green patches, on ledges and narrow paths, one traced the little Welsh sheep grazing and straying. Ere many days were over, these would all be hunted down and folded by the dogs and the shepherds—many sheep and many folds.

On the left, too, below the road, at intervals one came upon a small house, a tiny mountain farm, looking desolate, abandoned and world-forgotten. Round about it were small patches of bright green grass, oases in a desert, on which a head or two of black cattle, quietly chewing the cud of reflection, probably formed the greater portion of the worldly substance of their owner. And here occasionally, with great care and industry, a small portion of ground had been enclosed, worked and tilled, until it brought forth grain to the husbandman, truly and indeed the precious fruit of the earth. And now from that stony wall uprose a huge heron, that, with slow and majestic flight, winged its upward way and was lost beyond the mountain tops.

And then—a sudden shock. Was the valley closing in? Had one of those great boulders loosened, and were we about to end our days beneath its weight? Or had the earth opened to swallow us up? No, nothing of all this; but the horse had fallen, and upon examination was found to have cut its knees badly. Apart from pity for the animal and vexation at the accident, it was a predicament to be in. We were still nearly two miles from Llanberis, and the horse was so hurt that to go forward seemed difficult, to return impossible.

But in this world, most difficulties have their way of escape: the irremediable seldom happens. Whether this is due to an overruling

Power, to the ministering of invisible but surrounding spirits, they who have seen most of the world and followed most carefully the course of their own lives and the lives of those about them, will find it an easy matter to decide. Our escape from this present trouble lay in a cottage not ten yards ahead : the only cottage all down the pass that we had seen on the right, or that could have been of any use to us.

An old woman was keeping house. She looked a hundred, and she had "no English." But the driver, who on his part had very nearly "no Welsh," quickly made her understand what was wanted, and in a few minutes hot water and a bucket and cloths were doing their best to stanch the wound and stem the deep red pool that had gathered in the road.

With such help we were able presently to go on our way, if not rejoicing, at any rate in better form than not many minutes ago seemed possible. Before long we reached the famous slate quarries of Llanberis. At the foot of the mountain was a lake of some size, now fast filling in with débris from the works. High up were the quarries, gallery above gallery, a great number of men at work, looking like Lilliputians. At intervals, the report of blasting thundered out like the boom of cannon, and echoed amongst the surrounding hills. The men are paid according to their labour, and some of them earn very high wages. But, like other sources of industry, the quarries pay less than they once did, and employ a smaller number of men.

It was a curious sight, even at a distance, to see these terraces of dark gray slate, rising one above another on the mountain side ; to watch the trucks running up and down, and hear the showers of broken slate rolling downwards with a noise like the swish of a hundred seas upon a pebbly shore. Soon after this we reached the hotel at Llanberis, where much sympathy was bestowed upon the driver and much care given to the horse. Here we halted for an hour and more; long enough to rest the animal, not long enough to stiffen it for the return journey.

All the wildness and severity of the pass had now disappeared. It is a very lovely spot. The hills surround the plain in great piles and magnificent slopes, and some are wooded and verdant, and others are stern and barren, whilst their outlines are short, peaked and diversified. The lakes of Llanberis add much to its beauty, but all this is more evident and much more striking in driving from Carnarvon than from the opposite direction. Then, one grand feature after another opens out from its best point of view, and you acknowledge that the drive is one of the loveliest in Wales.

And, continuing that drive, I am not sure that the wild pass which follows is not also more striking and effective, for the gloom and grandeur of the rocky valley, as it may be called, stand out in yet greater contrast with the softer beauty of the vale which has gone before.

In spite of all its beauty, Llanberis appeared scarcely the place for a lengthened sojourn. Probably no one ever does stay there very long. The Victoria Hotel, however, seemed comfortable and well arranged, though it belonged to the same proprietor as the Royal at Carnarvon, which is not greatly to be commended. The large coffee-room of the Victoria overlooked its garden, and in the garden, though so late in the season, roses bloomed and shed their fragrance. Hills stretched away on either hand, and seemed to meet where the road winds round towards Carnarvon. The village, nearly a mile beyond the hotel, had nothing particularly remarkable or interesting about it. A circular tower, near the inn, said to date back to the sixth century

Llanberis Pass.

was dignified by the title of Dolbadarn Castle, and about a quarter of an hour's walk from this is a waterfall about sixty feet high, which rushes down in a thin stream, and is picturesque. But on the whole there was something decidedly depressing about Llanberis, and one was not sorry to set out on the return journey.

With a maimed horse that journey promised to be a more formidable undertaking than it proved. We began to retrace our steps with some misgiving, but the horse, doctored, rested and refreshed, stepped out bravely. It would evidently be a work of time, but that was all. To begin with, there was the five-mile pass to be taken, a steep uphill all the way, and it had to be done at a very walking pace. Presently we reached the cottage which had proved our friend-in-need, and halted to bestow largesse upon the good woman who had freely given of her best. For in the vexation of the contretemps the kindly dame

had been forgotten at starting, and until our return her meditations upon the gratitude of mankind must have placed that virtue at a serious discount. However, all was now made straight and satisfactorily balanced, and, if a woman's smile is divine, we certainly left a divinity behind us, though shrivelled and a century old.

By the time we reached the head of the pass, the shades of night were gathering. A cold mist was creeping round about the mountains and in the valley, shutting out their very forms and outlines. Capel Curig was invisible, and the lighted hotel windows looked warm and comfortable in comparison with the outside gloom and cold. For

LLEDR VALLEY.

with the mist comes a chilling atmosphere which defies resistance and makes nothing so desirable as the end of the journey.

This came at last. The horse bravely held on its way. We gradually descended into the hills, the valley narrowed almost to a pass, the rushing river was once more on our left, the trees looked mysterious and melancholy. Then came the lights of Bettws-y-Coed, then the hotel. The good horse had earned its rest, and indeed for some days to come would have to be in hospital.

One of the most romantic spots about Bettws-y-Coed is the Fairy Glen, and it is really worthy of its name. Passing up a narrow roadway, hills romantically disposed on either side and innumerable small passes, you reach a gate, where of course no gate need be, and where

a maiden stands to exact a toll and admit you into the glen. It is a wild scene, all rocks and tangle and trees. Far down, the river runs noisily over its rocky bed, and the trees that overshadow it find no reflection in its broken surface, but the sunshine glinting through those trees is caught up by the water in a thousand sparkling jewels. It is perhaps the loveliest glen in Wales.

From this you may, if you please, continue your way up the valley of the Lledr. To-day, with another horse, and a much less intelligent driver, after paying due respect to the Fairy Glen, we ourselves went up this lovely valley. On our left was the river, which in parts runs in a narrow rocky precipitous channel, with great rush and noise, and in the way of water and cataract seemed the finest and most romantic thing I had seen in Wales. High, wooded hills lay to the right, and every now and then we passed through short avenues of over-arching trees, which threw their deep shadows athwart the road. A few fishermen were whipping the stream, and several artists, under the inevitable white umbrella, were doing their best to earn fame and fortune. Down the road came a man carrying a machine that looked like a camera, and we took him to be a travelling photographer. But on near approach he turned out to be a blacksmith—a very black one indeed—whose life was more probably devoted to the useful than the artistic.

Passing through a grove of fresh young firs, whose scent was refreshing, the mountains opened out, and we reached Pont-y-Pant, a spot with a railway station, and a white, pleasant looking inn, where a fisherman might be happy and industrious, whilst his days succeeded and resembled each other. It struck me that I would rather make a long sojourn here than at Bettws-y-Coed. The spot was more open and healthy, and quite sufficiently beautiful.

After this we met many droves of black cattle coming down from the hills for the winter. They looked wild and ready to charge us—but happily confined their desires to looks only. Some of their drovers appeared as wild as the cattle; tall, strong men, with limbs like Hercules, who might almost have fought with the beasts and conquered them.

Passing the remains of an old Roman bridge, the character of the valley changed. All its beauty and luxuriance was lost; it grew wild and severe. The hills were bare of trees or any vegetation, except the short rank grass which often accompanies marshy ground. Peat stacks abounded, some of them covered with great branches of trees brought there for that purpose; and long black lines, where the turf had been removed, ran along the ground and reminded one of the peat fields of Shetland, though with not half the grandeur, tone, and fine effect of those wide-reaching and desolate moors.

We ascended a wild, bleak, unprotected mountain path, one of the highest mountain passes in Wales. And, alas, as if the scene was not bare and desolate enough, uprose a cold wind, down came torrents of

rain, and our misery was complete. All sunshine had disappeared, wet clouds enwrapped us.

We came to a solitary house in the very midst of the pass, looking like a house of ill-omen, where murders might have been committed, and victims thrown down wells, or reduced to ashes, with no bird of the air to carry the tale. A house of most sinister aspect. Sinister must have been its dealings also, for it was closed and tenantless, and those who once held sway there, and called it an inn, had been deprived of their licence. The place where the sign had hung was visible; the sign itself was no more. It had probably borne some strangely inappropriate name, just as a public-house I have frequently passed in visiting a dear old far-off Rector, whom we have met before in these pages, had for its sign until lately: "THE GUARDIAN ANGEL!"

Outside the door of this deserted Welsh inn, which sheltered and half-concealed its shame by an angle of the house, was a small dried-up pool, and one's imagination pleased itself by running riot, and conjuring up all kinds of ghastly deeds—a pool made by the blood of victims murdered in the dead of night, and buried by torchlight, a wild glare reflected upon the faces of the imps and fiends digging deep holes and dancing upon newly-made, unholy graves. But these things *have* happened in the world, and ghosts may well be said to walk. All reason is against ghosts, all evidence in favour of them, said Dr. Johnson; but if we came to search out the matter, perhaps even reason would add a certain weight to evidence.

We left the wicked-looking house behind us, whose very silence and desertion seemed mysterious, and began to descend towards Festiniog. Soon we were in the midst of slate quarries, right and left, and everything that looked business-like and unromantic. Yet, after all, slate quarries are clean work; unsightly to a certain extent, but far less so, and far less repelling, than the works of the Black Country districts of England. Here, there were no black coal-pits, no huge chimnies sending forth volumes of smoke, to defile the air and turn the pure skies of heaven into a dark and melancholy pall. And the men seemed a better class than the miners; less rough and savage, more humanized. No wonder that the poor miners, surrounded by such influences, cut off from all that is beautiful in nature, having nothing in their lives or their occupation to elevate them—no wonder that so many sink to the lowest level of humanity.

Festiniog itself is such a town as one might expect it to be, with interests all centred in trade. Its crooked streets are untidy and depressing, and the visitors' book at the Queen's Hotel recorded that at Festiniog it always rains. It was raining now, in torrents, so we concluded that the statement was more correct than such records often are. The waitress, however, must have been a sort of feminine Mark Tapley. She was interesting and entertaining, no longer very juvenile, but full of energy. And this in spite of an approaching dissolution: not of the body, but as regarded her connection with the hotel. After

living there for any number of years, she was about to give up all and depart for America, simply because friends had written home that they wanted her.

She was a Welshwoman, and spoke English with a very pretty accent. "Maybe," she said, whilst bustling about and spreading the festive though frugal board, "I ought to have gone years ago, when I was a younger woman. Old trees, it is said, don't bear trans-

FAIRY GLEN.

planting. But I've plenty of courage and spirit, and I don't fear. My passage is taken and my berth chosen, and I've some one to meet me at the other end of the journey." And spirit she certainly had, and evidently a temperament to make the best of things, and no doubt she would get on in the New World. But it was a bold undertaking on the part of a woman no longer in her first youth.

I think her cheerfulness must have influenced the weather. Suddenly, without warning, the rain ceased, the clouds dispersed, out came sunshine and blue sky. Nothing could have been more welcome; and from Stormy, one's spirits went up, with the glass, to Set

Fair. Jehu, who had been anxiously consulting the clouds for the last half-hour, came round in grand form, with dry rugs and cushions and a beatified countenance.

We climbed the hill between the quarries, admired the quality and quantity of the slates; noted that the very poles in the back gardens were made of slate, that walls and palings and even front doors were made of slate; in fact that we were surrounded by an atmosphere of slate, until we wondered whether they had discovered a means of making it transparent for windows, and reducing it to an article of food. Up the hill, and past the solitary and deserted house, which defied even the sunshine to make it look cheerful, and over the mountain height, and down again into the lovelier, smiling Valley of the Lledr. Trees overhung the winding river. Far off sloping hills were cut by hedges to their summit, enclosing rich and fertile fields, and making this valley so sunny and rich in appearance. Approaching Bettws-y-Coed, the valley narrowed; we plunged into the heart of the hills; trees overhung our path. Over the old Waterloo bridge spanning the Lledr, a sharp curve to the right, and our drive was ended.

Just within the passage was the old oak, painted by David Cox, which gives its name to the hotel, and is as much a fixture, I suppose, as the stone of which the house is built, or the ground on which it stands. Certainly it is no wonder that David Cox thought so much of the beauties of the neighbourhood.

That night the moon rose full of a "divine effulgence" in the dark blue sky, a portion of the landscape illuminated with her pale, soft light, the rest thrown into deeper shadow. Stars shone as they shine only in frosty weather, or in a pure atmosphere. Hills stood out in broad outlines distinctly mapped against the dark heavens. Here and there a light gleamed from a house on the slopes, making more dense the surrounding blackness. Trees in the moonlight, like dark spectres, stretched forth ghostly but well-clothed arms, for the leaves had not yet begun to fall. The rooks that are for ever cawing round the hotel and peer in at your windows with black eyes full of mischief, like birds of evil omen, were now silent and unseen. Not a breath of air stirred, and the leaves and the branches had no rustle in them. Except for the noise of the river, which never ceases, everything was shrouded in mysterious, solemn silence. Not a creature was abroad. Silence everywhere: in the plain, and on the hills, and in the air. And over all, the waning moon, pursuing her course, fulfilling her destiny; a dead world, but one with a mission still, to be accomplished and delivered up only on that day when moons shall wax and wane no more.

"HER FRANCIS."

By Mary Mudie, Author of "St. Michael's Priory."

"MANY a true word is spoken in jest." So runs the old saying, and Mabel Talbot could for one have vouched for its truth, for a harmless jest became her fate. She was one of a large family of boys and girls, had lived the twenty-two years of her life in a country village, and had never stayed more than a day at a time in London. What an enchanted prospect then seemed to open before her when her friend Helen Keith asked her to spend the winter with herself and her mother in Florence!

As Mabel was starting, one young married sister said to her:

"I wonder if you will meet 'your Francis' at last?"

And another sister, with the superior wisdom of one who had just been wooed and won, answered for Mabel:

"Of course she will! only mind, Mabel, that you look well out for him."

"Your Francis" was the jest above alluded to. One day Mabel had, in the hearing of eleven merry brothers and sisters, thoughtlessly said: "How I dislike the abbreviation of Francis into Frank! Francis is a fine name, and Frank has no more character about it than Charlie or Harry." That was enough; and the latest phase of the joke was the ludicrous notion that, as she was by far the prettiest of the family, she must be waiting for a certain "Francis," not only so named by his godfathers and godmothers, but one who had never at any time been called by its abbreviation. Mabel laughed as merrily as any of them, and then forgot all about "her Francis" until she reached the Italian frontier, when for the first time her journey became marked by some vicissitudes.

On a cold, stormy night the train was stopped at the little station of C——, for the floods were out. A scene of confusion ensued. After the Italian guards had made the sleepy and alarmed foreigners understand what had occurred, everyone naturally left the train to seek what accommodation could be found in the village; only, however, to return with vexation added to their former alarm. The one solitary inn could only take in a few of the passengers, and the remainder had to make back again to their carriages with the difference of being wet through instead of dry.

Mabel Talbot was one of the fortunate ones. Some kindly arms —whose she never knew—carried her and her small luggage safely over the water and she made her way to the inn. She could not speak a word of Italian, but quickly comprehended how kind and sympathetic was her welcome. Neither gratitude, however, nor a vivid imagination could help her to feel comfortable. Her narrow

passage-room had a damp, stone floor, was lighted by a small wick floating in oil, and was pervaded by a smell of garlic. Her bed was a narrow table, her pillow her carpet-bag, and her travelling rug had to do duty for everything else.

As she lay there cramped and shivering, she became gradually accustomed to the dim light and saw an object which had escaped her notice and which looked like a coat lying across a chair. She was not long in fetching it, and, even in the semi-darkness, saw that it was a thickly-lined English ulster, probably the property of one of her fellow-passengers who, she had little doubt, would have given much to be wearing it at that moment. She felt, however, that it was little use pitying the unlucky owner; and very grateful to him for having left it, she lay down again and spread it over her. Her teeth stopped chattering, her eyes closed, and she went off into a sound sleep.

When the noises made by the awakening household began to disturb her, the following dream came to her :—

She dreamt that she was engaged to be married to a not particularly young man, whose christian name was—Francis. His face made a strong impression upon her. It was not strictly handsome, but the owner had what is called a fine head. Further, he had a kindly expression and a slightly inquisitive look in his keen, gray eyes which was very characteristic. How they came to be engaged she was unable to remember, but he seemed to know her past, *for he was asking her to call him Frank.*

"Not for the world!" she said. "I hate the name. You would not seem yourself at all. I might just as well call you Charlie or Harry."

"We have it on very good authority that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet," he answered, smiling.

"Then Shakespeare was wrong," returned the dreamer, not smiling at all.

"Am I to take it for granted, then, that you took me for my name and not for myself?"

"Your name is Francis," persisted Mabel.

"I am aware of it. But Francis or Frank, I am myself."

"And yourself is Francis."

But in spite of her obstinacy she got the worst of the argument, and the soft-hearted Francis, seeing signs of tears, offered to make it up. She would not, however, accept his kiss of peace, and at that moment, awoke to find herself struggling so much that she had nearly fallen off the table.

The velvet collar of the ulster was lying across her mouth, its soft touch, having, no doubt, suggested that lover-like ending to her dream.

At first Mabel was too bewildered to distinguish dream from reality; but the daylight streaming in at the curtainless window

gave her a vague idea that she must be "up and doing." As she jumped down she dragged the ulster with her, and as she lifted it up a letter fell out of one of the pockets. She would have been no true daughter of Eve had she not been seized with a desire to know the name of the owner of that coat, under the comforting warmth of which she had slept so well and also dreamt that ridiculous dream.

"Why should I not know the name?" she asked herself, picking up the letter.

And as there was no one to answer her—only her very natural curiosity to urge her the other way—she did read the name :—

"Francis Grantley, Esquire!"

II.

"Now don't be foolish and get excited about nothing," said Mabel to herself "for you would have dreamt exactly the same dream if Mr. Grantley's name had been Thomas or John." This seemed so true that she did preserve some calmness of mind. "Any way you and he are never likely to meet as long as you live, for he is probably on his way to India, or regions equally remote." And with this last self-comforting admonition she resolutely put the letter back in its place and folded up the coat.

"He was never called Frank, I am sure," she soliloquized, unable to keep from the forbidden subject, as she remarked the unusual length and breadth of the coat, "though of course Franks are of all sizes. Poor man!" she continued as she felt its thickness. "Perhaps if he had known what a boon it was to me he would not have minded so much shivering all night. I wish I could let him know how much obliged I am.—— And why should he not know it?" as a sudden thought struck her.

If she could have spoken Italian she would have left a message with the landlord; therefore, instead, she scribbled in pencil, on the back of the letter:

"Many thanks for the loan of the coat."

What is done cannot be undone. Perhaps no one ever realised that more thoroughly than did Mabel Talbot, when she saw those few pencilled words of hers staring back at her from a stranger's letter. She could not possibly tear up the envelope; she could only thrust the letter back into the pocket of the coat and hide her own deed from her own eyes. How devoutly she hoped that Mr. Grantley really was on his way to India! The further off the better. And during her journey she registered many a vow never again to act on any occasion in life without due reflection.

The Keiths had rooms on the sunny side of the river, on the Lung' Arno Acciajoli; and coming, as Mabel did, from the gray November skies of England, she perfectly revelled in the sunny weather which set in on her arrival in that brightest of cities. She was also, according

to Helen Keith (a handsome, clever woman, in every way a contrast to pretty little inexperienced Mabel), in one succession of "gushes" over every picture and statue, piece of tapestry and mosaic, the Cathedral and Giotto's Tower, the Baptistry and the wonderful gates which Michael Angelo pronounced fit to be the gates of Paradise; Fra Angelico's angels and the Lucca della Robbia, &c. So full of delight and excitement was she that for some days she forgot both her whimsical dream and her fears. Under Helen Keith's guidance she was made to "do" Florence thoroughly. Helen had her own opinions about most things, which she expected Mabel to accept; and Mabel, not being given to original thought, was nothing loth to be helped over this her first stile into the domains of art.

One morning, however, Helen took her to Giotto's little chapel in the church of Santa Croce, and, giving her Ruskin's little pamphlet, let her puzzle the matter out for herself.

Very puzzled did Mabel feel, as she leant against the wall opposite the fresco which depicts the trial by fire before the Soldan, and read out a sentence here and there. She was quite deep in thought when she heard spoken, very quietly, in English:

"What a pretty voice!"

"And a still prettier face! What brown eyes and golden hair!" said another voice.

At that moment two gentlemen, presumably the speakers, descended the steps of the chapel behind her, and walked down the nave. They passed close to her, and, as they did so, Mabel made a sudden dart forward. Enveloping one of the two, a very tall man, was *the* ulster; she would have known it again anywhere!

III.

As Mabel started forward, Helen sprang after her. "Mabel!" she cried, aghast, "do you want to show the pretty face?"

"My face!" and Mabel looked at her in amazement. "No; I want to see his."

It was now Helen's turn to look amazed, the more so that Mabel suddenly coloured violently all over that pretty face so little in her thoughts, and turning sharply away stared blindly at a medallion of St. Louis through a rush of tears, which had quickly come into her eyes. Whether she was most vexed with herself, or mortified by her friend, or disappointed in her desire, she could not possibly have told.

"I don't understand, Mabel," said Helen, very gently. "You cannot know those men, or they would not have spoken so of you?"

Mabel made the worst answer she could have chosen. "No, I don't know them. I only know the ulster that one of them wore."

"His ulster!" cried Helen Keith, laughing and wondering whether Mabel was losing her senses.

Mabel knew that, in her place, she would have felt the same, but, being in her own, she was not at all amused, was unaccountably sore, and certainly felt very foolish. Outside the church Helen began again.

"You really do not know those men, Mabel?"

Mabel had grown wiser; she only shook her head.

"Then I may as well tell you that I know one of them—the one who spoke of the pretty voice and who also wore *the* ulster—very well."

"No! do you really?" cried Mabel, very eagerly.

Helen was more than ever mystified. "He is one of our neighbours at home," she continued; "so you will soon get to know something more of him than his coat."

Life is not all art in Florence, and Mabel went to a dance that evening where she might have thought herself in England but for a sprinkling of uniforms and some artistic and musical heads. The foreign element would have interested her had she not been on the look out for an English face. She believed herself to be very rational, yet she saw no face like her dream "Francis," and soliloquised on the folly of the English, who keep up their usual habits wherever they go. How could anyone dance all the evening after sight-seeing all day? At that moment she heard Helen say:

"Francis, come and be introduced to Mabel Talbot. Mabel, this is another of my old friends, Mr. Grantley."

There was no weariness about Mabel now, and Helen wondered at the excitement which lit up the usually pale face and soft eyes.

"Miss Keith tells me that this is your first visit to Italy," said Mr. Grantley, when Helen had left them.

Mabel summoned the courage to look up—looked and met the very same shrewd eyes which she had seen in her dream!

But, together with the shock of her surprise, came the comforting reassurance that those eyes were looking at something quite new to them. And indeed it was a very pleasant sight they looked at, but she was too full of her secret thoughts to notice the evident admiration she was causing.

"Of course," she was saying to herself, "as he was one of my fellow-travellers, I must have seen him without remembering it." And this practical explanation of a seemingly mysterious occurrence restored her equanimity.

She did not let their conversation rest long on a commonplace footing, and very soon managed to introduce the word "adventure."

"The days for adventure are over," he said.

"But not for odd things," she returned, provoked into boldness.

He threw back his head and laughed. "You are quite right, and the oddest thing happened only the other day. I was a passenger in that train which was stopped by the floods. Perhaps you may remember about it?"

Perhaps she could!

"Well, I scrambled out into the water like everyone else and found some sort of accommodation at the inn. At the last moment, however, I changed my mind; only, worse luck, I left my ulster in the little hole of a room that I was to have occupied."

"Were you not very cold without it?" asked Mabel, finding it impossible not to betray some sympathy now that she learnt that she was really indebted to him for the room, as well as, by chance, for the coat.

"Oh, yes; but then I am accustomed to the ups and downs of travel; and the night was soon over."

"Did you recover your coat easily in the morning?"

"At once; for the lady who had occupied the room had already left it. But now to come to the point of my story. A few days ago I looked for a letter which I had left in the pocket of my ulster, and what do you think I found written at the back of it?"

Mabel could think very well and felt herself blushing hotly.

"'Many thanks for the loan of the coat!'"

"What a bold creature!" said Mabel, thinking, that she would rather say it of herself than hear it from him. To her amazement all mirth vanished from his face.

"Bold!" he cried, looking indignantly at her. "On the contrary, I think it was very thoughtful and sympathetic. I am sure she is a charming girl."

"Why not a charming old lady?"

"Old!" Then he smiled and looked beyond the bright, listening face as if he saw something almost as sweet. "No, I know that she was young. The landlord called her a *Signorina*."

"Everybody is called a Signorina in Italy," said Mabel hastily, not all his championship having shaken her opinion that she had done a supremely silly thing. "The very blind beggars who stand propped up against the sunny walls of the Lung' Arno address every woman of whom they beg as *Signorina*."

"No use, Miss Talbot; I have a theory about the writer of those words and you will not laugh me out of it. I do not suppose that she was a young girl, as she was alone, but she was certainly new to travelling or she would have taken the good chances with the bad ones more philosophically."

What a description of herself, thought Mabel.

"No, no," he went on smilingly. "I have my ideal and I shall keep to it. And, what is more, if she is in Florence, sooner or later, I shall identify her."

"But you know nothing of her except her handwriting."

"And is not that enough?"

Looking at his keen eyes, and remembering that he was an habitué of the Keiths' house, Mabel felt sure that it was quite enough. And her heart sank within her.

IV.

THAT was not the only time that Mabel Talbot and Mr. Grantley discussed the "charming girl" who had permitted herself such a liberty with his letter. But though he persistently stood her champion, it did not prevent his falling—and very completely too—in love with this very pretty young woman of two-and-twenty who was as fresh and merry as a child. No day passed without his seeking Mabel.

One day he overtook her carrying a book from the library.

"Mrs. Oliphant's Life of St. Francis! Ah! my namesake," he said, taking her book from her.

"More likely your namesake if he had been St. Frank," answered Mabel laughing.

He laughed too as he said: "That does not sound very saint-like. But, as it happens, I have never been called Frank in my life. My dear mother disliked the abbreviation; and, oddly enough, at school, though my nicknames were numberless, Frank was not one of them."

As he told her this, Mabel felt that it was no use saying any more against herself. The children had been right, and she had found *a* Francis after all. But was he *her* Francis?

From that day she felt an absurd jealousy of that ideal young lady traveller. More than ever did she dread the thought of his discovering her identity with herself. She became even more vigilant in concealing all writing of hers and also avoided the subject as much as possible. Helen Keith, however, who had long known his side of the story, brought it up one day during a walk up the hills to Fiesole, the little Etruscan city which overlooks Florence.

"No," he answered. "I have not seen the handwriting, but I shall see it one day." Then he had one of his hearty laughs, in which Helen could not help joining. Mabel on any other subject would have laughed too.

"I know I shall see it," he continued; "I feel it in the air. Don't you feel things in the air, sometimes, Miss Keith?"

"Yes, I feel a Tramontana like to-day." And Helen shivered as the fierce north wind met them, and drew a shawl up to her face, but it was chiefly to hide a smile. She knew Mr. Grantley's feelings for Mabel; also the latter's ridiculous and evident jealousy—a fact which could not but give him hope.

"How practical you are, Miss Keith. You seem to take a delight in snubbing me. You snubbed me, I remember, the first time I had the pleasure of speaking to you."

"Did I? Then I beg your pardon. I won't do it again."

"But I like it," he said quickly. "Pray snub me—in your own way—as much as you like."

"If you talk of feeling a strange handwriting in the air, I warn you that I shall do so."

"But I do feel it, I assure you. Did you never play at the game of crying hot and cold? Well. I feel like that. I feel near to very hot."

"Then you may be sure that this north wind will be followed by a south one. A Scirocco always follows a Tramontana."

He was, however, to prove himself right.

The very next day, when the Keiths and Mabel returned from a drive they found Francis Grantley awaiting their return. Mabel had only made a few steps into the room when she gave a suppressed shriek and turned to fly.

"Mabel! what in the world is the matter?" cried Mrs. Keith and her daughter.

"A great deal is the matter," said Mr. Grantley, an ill-concealed joyousness in his voice, while he watched Mabel as a cat watches a mouse. "A great deal, I can tell you. I have been nearly roasted in your room."

Mrs. Keith, always the most concerned of hostesses, went up to the fire, when her daughter gently but firmly turned her towards the door.

"Surely I might take off one of the logs," Mrs. Keith was heard espostulating as the two were left together and alone—Francis Grantley comparing a pencil list of books, written out by Mabel, left lying on the table, with an envelope on which were written her thanks —and Mabel, her hands before her eyes afraid to see in his what he thought of her.

In some more polite form he must be going to rudely break the waking dream which had followed the real one. "Her Francis" he could no longer be now. But what happened instead? He was kneeling at her feet, trying to remove her hands from before her face.

"Miss Talbot! Mabel! You dearest and sweetest . . . ."

His words ceased abruptly and he sprang up as the door opened and Helen looked cautiously in. When she entered the room followed by several visitors, Francis Grantley was its sole occupant.

He and Mabel had only had a second of time to look at each other, but during that second their hearts had mutely finished and answered those interrupted words.

V.

Mabel was in a tumult of joy. He did not think of her as her sensitive love had feared, but she was his "sweetest and dearest . . . . ." The remainder she could fill up for herself. Had she not known "her Francis" before he had known her? Had she not seen that look of love on his face before?

When she returned to the sitting-room her joy received its first check. Francis Grantley was gone, but other visitors had come who

seemed to be all talking at once. Helen's words were the only ones out of which she could make any sense.

"How lucky that he left the telegram behind, otherwise we should have thought he had taken leave of his senses. I trust he will see his friend alive. He must, I think, have caught the Rome express. He certainly wasted no time in good-byes or explanations." Mabel caught Helen's eyes and the loving sympathy in them made her hide her face over the forgotten telegram which had become common property.

It was as Helen had said. Francis Grantley had been summoned to Rome to the deathbed of a friend, and a glance at her watch told her that he could no longer be in Florence.

For some days no news came from him. Helen thought it very strange, but as Mabel seemed only to think of his trouble, she kept her own thoughts to herself. Mabel, however, was only acting a part. As the days went by a small voice—a treacherous one it seemed to her—kept whispering that he ought to have found time to write—if only one word to complete those interrupted spoken ones. Then she would recall that glance which they had exchanged and her joy returned in full.

She would have found those days more difficult to pass through had she not been partly taken out of herself by the unexpected arrival of a dear friend on the evening of Mr. Grantley's departure. This was one Hugh Sedley, a young man some years her senior, who was engaged to be married to her favourite cousin, Charlotte Burns. He was one of those sunny faced, bright eyed people who, when they have troubles win the sympathy of others at once. His trouble was six months' delay of his marriage, and he could not have found a more sympathetic recipient of all his thoughts and feelings than Mabel was at that moment. She needed distraction and she felt so sorry for any sort of disappointment to be borne, that by the time she had done the honours of Florence to him all day and let him talk everlastingly of Charlotte, they both felt their sorrows lightened.

Helen Keith, however, who was not in Hugh's confidence, felt a trouble grow within her the lighter theirs grew, but Mabel's natural reserve made it impossible for her even to hint at a danger which perhaps might be merely imagination. She could only try to keep them apart as much as possible, and she succeeded so far well that Mabel spent the greater part of Christmas Day with other friends. Towards evening she returned, and seeing Helen and Hugh Sedley talking over the fire, she went up to her room and sat in the dusk, glad of this moment of solitude with her own painful thoughts.

There must be some mistake! He must have written, and the letter had never been posted; or in that busy season had miscarried; and so perhaps he was blaming her too. That some news of him would reach her that day, she felt sure. He would never let it pass without a word of greeting to the Keiths.

At this moment Helen entered the room dressed for dinner. Mabel started up, thinking it must be late. Perhaps she had news for her.

"What are you doing there in the dark?" The suspiciousness in her voice made Helen force a laugh.

"No harm," replied Mabel. "I was having a sort of 'meditation among the tombs.'"

Helen's answer was to put her arm suddenly round Mabel.

"Why, Helen, what is it?" she asked, startled and uneasy at her action and then at her silence. "There is no bad news? Nothing from home?"

"No, nothing from your home. Indeed mamma herself received only one letter this morning. It was from Naples."

"From Naples," echoed Mabel a little faintly. "Who does she know there? Helen, speak! who is in Naples?" she repeated, a deadly chill creeping over her at her friend's ominous silence.

"Many people—Francis Grantley, for one."

"But he will be here to-morrow—or the next day?

"He said he did not know when he should return. Perhaps he might run over to Cairo or Algiers."

Cairo or Algiers or the other end of the world; it was all the same to Mabel Talbot.

Mabel never willingly recalled the hour which followed Helen's leaving the room until she started up and dressed herself in feverish haste. In that short time she seemed to have become some other Mabel Talbot, who would soon have to return to the home where she had passed more than twenty years of tranquil happiness, carrying with her a remembrance which she could ask no one to help her to bear. A remembrance that accident had thrown a coat in her way, that the Fates had willed that its owner should be named Francis, and that the said unlucky Mabel Talbot had scribbled a few words on the back of a letter. And that was all the story? No. Something more. She had taken falseness for truth. It was no dream, that scene that she had taken part in, and that Helen had been obliged to interrupt, and had therefore been a witness to. Yet was it unreal as a dream, for it had been an acted lie.

And the days went on.

One afternoon she was near the post-office, and was overtaken by a heavy shower. While she stood under the colonnades, Hugh Sedley suddenly rushed past her. He stopped short on seeing her.

"Oh, Mabel," he said breathlessly, "so awfully sorry you were not in. I read Lottie's last letter to Helen Keith. Lottie *is* the best girl in all the world. You don't half know what she is."

"I ought to do so," answered Mabel, smiling involuntarily, "for I have known her ever since she was born."

Hugh looked rather jealously at her, and then laughed.

"Well, never mind. I shall have her all to myself soon. But I must be off and post this to her. I'll come this evening and read you out what she says."

Mabel, still smiling, notwithstanding the trouble with which she fought night and day, went to see if the shower were over. Only a few drops were falling, so she set off. The narrow dark street into which she turned was unusually crowded with carts and carriages, and, engrossed with her own miserable thoughts, she never noticed until she was in the thick of them—for it had no footway—that she was in danger of being run over. Suddenly she felt herself seized and drawn back, but only just in time. She looked up to thank Hugh Sedley, as she expected, and found herself face to face with—Francis Grantley! But a Francis Grantley such as she had never seen, either in dreamland or in life, holding out a rigid arm for her to take, which might have been that of a statue insensible to human touch, so cold and expressionless did his face look.

The bitter suffering of the last weeks surged up in her brain and seemed to set it on fire as she saw the stony face of the man who had caused it. Had a thousand deaths been before her she would willingly have died them all sooner than accept the support he offered her. Without one word of thanks for saving the life that he had embittered for always, she turned and left him. Had she but looked back, she would have seen nothing stony about him then. Could he have been mistaken? What did that proud, pale face, those burning, indignant eyes mean?

"You have no umbrella," he said hoarsely, as he overtook her; "and another heavy shower is coming."

She darted under a near archway. He followed her leisurely and found her as far inside as she could go, her pale face and glowing eyes brought out in curious relief by the light of a lamp before a shrine in the opposite wall. Why did he not let her alone, she asked herself. What bitter mockery of her pain! To care nothing for breaking her heart, but much that a few drops of rain should fall upon her! She felt more than saw that he was examining her closely.

"You are changed, Miss Talbot," he said. "A few weeks ago a shower would not have struck you dumb."

Changed! Mabel would have forced herself to deny this had it not been for something in his tone. Had his voice trembled?

Her expression was less hard as she stammered out: "I was startled, surprised. I did not know that you were in Florence."

He leant towards her, and his words were low but very distinct.

"Why not say at once that my presence here is unwelcome to you."

She changed colour, and her lips trembled a little.

"The rude suggestion was yours and not mine."

"At least confess," and he came a step nearer, "that you are disappointed that it was not Mr. Sedley who prevented your committing suicide—as you seemed clearly bent upon doing."

"Mr.—who?" asked Mabel, still not understanding what was in his mind, from sheer surprise at hearing the name on his lips.

"Yes, Mr. Sedley," he repeated. "Perhaps you are offended at my want of manners. Allow me to make amends, and congratulate you now, then."

Mabel never quite remembered what happened as she stood and listened to the few words which revealed to her the cause of his unaccountable conduct. It flashed across her for the first time that, after all, they had never been quite engaged, had never had a thorough explanation. Subsequent events, rumour, might easily have made him believe her to be engaged to Hugh Sedley, and that she had only been amusing herself with him! What could he have thought of her! But he still loved her! The rush of joy flooding her heart almost stifled her, and she rushed out into the rain.

He brought her back. "Why do you not thank me for my congratulations?" he asked.

"Because I don't happen to be the woman that he is going to marry."

"Who is, then?"

"My cousin—Charlotte Burns."

He staggered against the wall as white as death. "Great heavens! What lies people tell! Mabel, if you saw a fellow creature starving you *could* not hold food to his lips and then draw it away again?"

"I have spoken the truth."

"And yet you spent all your time with him until report gave him to you as your affianced husband?"

"I gave him my time and my sympathy, as I would have given them to my own brothers. He is almost a brother to me."

A deep sob shook him from head to foot. Mabel crept nearer to him, and the next few words were spoken with both her hands in his. "Mabel, listen. When I was forced to leave you without even a word of farewell, I meant to return immediately, but my poor friend lingered—and died; and even before then those lying tongues dealt me a death-blow. Mabel, if you ever had any love for me, tell me. It may not be too late for me to win it back."

And as he stooped his head to catch her whispered words, he heard her say that she had always loved him, even when she had tried to forget him—always—even before she had known him.

"Mabel," he said, a little hesitatingly when they were indoors. "I want you to do something for me—if only for once?"

"What can it possibly be—*Frank?*" she said in a very small voice, and blushing rosy red.

He smiled at her answer, yet a sigh of relief escaped him, making him feel rather foolish. He looked down at her and she looked up, and then they both laughed.

THE FABRIC OF A VISION.

EVERYONE but Edward and myself looked on our marriage as a misfortune.

To be sure we were the persons most interested, and to us it seemed the most desirable thing in the world. My father and mother did not like the match from the first, though Edward had arranged to stay in Australia for two years, at any rate. Edward was not strong; indeed he had come out for his health; and beyond the fact that his introductory letters were all that such things should be, we knew nothing of him. I knew more than the others, certainly; for I knew that I should be happy with him anywhere, even in England, and that the dearest duty of my life would be to take a wife's care of him.

We had taken a house at Glenelg and there we were to live an ideal life, till Edward grew quite strong, when we were to go to England. Edward was an only son, and Mr. Norreys, his father, was rich; so, as he said, our future was tolerably secure.

So much for intentions.

We had not been married a week when a telegram came to say that old Mr. Norreys was dead, and we left Adelaide by the next homeward-bound steamer.

It was terrible for him. I had my own selfish trouble too, in being so suddenly rooted up out of the old familiar soil of home love. But we were all in all to each other, the voyage did him a great deal of good, and my heartache was wearing itself out by the time we landed at Gravesend.

Of London I did not have a cheerful experience. It was June when we got there, and the dirty old Babylon was as smoky, as hot, and altogether as unpleasant as I had ever imagined it. Of its "sights" I saw none, except the dingy hotel sitting-room where I spent my days, while Edward was busy among lawyers in Lincoln's Inn, or at the rooms in the Albany, where his father had died. I had nothing to do all day but to worry myself, and fancy that Edward was looking ill again, and consequently was more than glad when some cousins of his at Carlisle wrote and asked us to come down to visit them. Edward at first did not want to go, but when he saw it would please me, he consented.

We left London on the first of July. It was a lovely morning. How delicious it was to get away into the clear country air, and receive my first glimpse of English country! It charmed me; but railway travelling always affects me in one way: before I can quite realise that I don't want to talk, I fall asleep. I did so now. When I awoke, Edward was speaking:

"Wake up, Mary," he was saying. "You're very tired and so am I.

We're coming to a very pretty place, and I mean to get out here and stay till to-morrow. You'll be done up before we get to Carlisle, if we push on to-day."

"What nonsense," I returned, instinctively putting my hair to rights, as a woman always does when she wakes up after a travelling nap. "I always sleep in trains. You don't know all my bad ways yet."

"I know your way of making yourself a willing martyr to other people's plans," laughed Edward; "but I want to stop here, if you'll permit it. In fact I can't go on.—The noise of this train shakes my head all to pieces."

"Don't you think," I ventured, "as we've got the tickets—and they expect us ——"

"Oh, hang the tickets," laughed my husband, beginning to get down hat-box, rugs and bags, from the netting overhead. "I've a strong fancy for seeing this place again—an overwhelming fancy for your seeing it. My dear Mary, I always have my own way—you know that."

It was quite true. His own way was generally as good a way as any other, I must admit, and Calverley—the place we stopped at—proved quite as pretty as he said it was. Certainly there was a factory at one end of the little town, but it did not spoil anything of the picturesqueness of the place. Only the river that ran through was not clear and bright as rivers should be, but dark and foul—and its very foam, where its path was made difficult with stones, was not white but yellow.

The factory itself was not ugly. It was large and white; not one big block, but a number of scattered buildings grouped irregularly round a big reservoir. This was walled round, and the strip of earth between wall and water was covered with long grass, aflame with great scarlet poppies. In the middle of the water was an island, just big enough to support a large pigeon cote, where the grey and brown and white birds flew in and out all day long, circling over the glassy water till it, like the air, seemed alive with the white shimmer of their wings. There was a wooded hill behind the "works," and to the left stretched the slate roofs of the town, under whose stone bridge the river flowed tumultuously.

There was nothing like this near Adelaide. The novelty of it all was bewildering. I saw so much, and heard so much during the afternoon, that I was fit for nothing in the evening but to lie on a very hard sofa trying to read an old railway novel. Edward said he would take a turn with a cigar—and I had a very dull time of it indeed.

It was a lovely evening. I could not wonder that Edward stayed out to enjoy it. But when the sun had gone redly down, when the gold and crimson after-glow had faded to faintest primrose and coral, and when at last the moon showed clearly in the deepening blue of the sky, I did think it was time he came back. It was half-past ten when he did come.

"All in the dark?" he asked. "Why didn't you ring for lights?"

His voice seemed to shake a little as he threw himself into an arm chair at the other end of the room.

"What's the matter?" I said. "I am afraid you've overtired yourself, Edward. I wish I had gone with you."

"Yes, that's just what it is," he replied, hurriedly. "I am overtired, and I feel quite faint. Just ring, Mary, will you?"

I rang; and he ordered some champagne, whereat I was rather astonished, for he rarely took anything after dinner.

"We both seem rather dull," he said, explanatorily, as the man left the room. "It's my fault for having been away from you so long. I was an idiot to go out. I can't get on without my wife."

"Then I wonder you *did* stop out so long," I said. "You could have come back ages before, if you had wanted to do so."

"I lost my way," he replied, "and went further than I intended."

Then the waiter came in with the champagne and glasses and two tall candles on a tray.

By the light from these last I thought Edward looked very, very tired. I dislike champagne and would not have any, and he went on drinking glass after glass and talking in a rather inconsequent way till the bottle was finished.

I was rather cross at having been alone all the evening, perhaps: and perhaps his London business had tired him as much as his walk; but there was a cloud between us, the first since our marriage. Until now there had always been between us such a perfect sympathy and rapport. He seemed far off from me as he sat there, talking. I felt sure that all that champagne could not be good for him.

That night—I suppose about two o'clock—I woke to find myself sitting up in bed, trembling with horror, my heart beating tumultuously.

"What is it?" said Edward, in a very wide-awake voice. "Whatever is the matter, Mary?"

"I have had such a horrible dream!" I replied, as soon as I could steady my voice. "Did I say anything, Edward?"

"No: you only gave a blood-curdling scream. What was your dream about?"

"Oh—it was a nightmare," I said, lying back on the pillow and holding my heart with both hands. "I don't want to talk about it. Did I wake you?"

"No, I've not been asleep. Don't throw your arms up again, Mary, but try and go to sleep. You won't dream it again, that's certain: nightmares never come twice."

I closed my eyes obediently, but only to conjure up again and again the picture that dream had shown me. This is what I saw over and over again, through the hot, still, moon-white hours:—

First a broad grassy field, through which ran a dark smooth stream. There was a wooden bridge over it, and just below this the river ran over a shelving ledge of rock and went smoothly down in an unbroken

sheet. Then it broke into yellow foam and hurried on. It looked deep. There was a wood behind me; just before me was a footpath. I saw everything in the clear moonlight. Along the footpath came presently two figures, and one of them was a figure I knew. It was Edward; looking strange, in some indefinable way—but still Edward unmistakably. Walking about a yard from him was a girl, dressed in a muslin gown. Her head was bare, and in her hand she held a white sun bonnet. At the end of the bridge they stood still and faced each other, and the girl's face was turned towards me. It was a pale face, with red lips and a high nose. A high-bred uncommon-looking face. The head was set well on the shoulders, and the rounded figure was thrown back in an attitude of defiance.

"Never," she said, and her big eyes flashed in the moonlight; "you've deceived me too often. I'll never see you again. Why did you not marry me when you had the chance?"

"I wish I had. Oh, Winifred, come to me; it is not too late yet. You see I couldn't keep away from here," and he held out his hands to her.

Then their voices sank till I could only hear a vague murmur. Then her voice rang out again, clear and sharp:

"No, Mr. Norreys; I tell you, *no!* There are other men in the world—ay, and in Calverley too—who have better and higher notions of keeping faith than you have."

"Do you mean that you'll marry one of them?" he said.

"Yes, and you will soon know how sincerely I mean it."

"Then, by heaven, he shall marry a ghost!" Edward cried, and caught her in his arms. There was a sudden splash—a choked cry—and something white went over the shelving wall down those seven feet into the smooth brown water.

Then came the crowning horror of the dream. He turned round with a look on his face of such fear and agony as I have never seen before. I knew that the girl was drowned. And I seemed to tear my way through wood and bramble back into consciousness, and into that still bedroom at the Calverley Arms.

Why did I not tell my husband what I had dreamed? Well, in those first moments of waking, so vivid, so utterly real and life-like had been that vision that I felt that to tell him the dream would be like charging him with the deed. I wished he had remained with me last evening. And why had he wanted so much to stay at Calverley, and why had he seemed so strange when he came in? I stopped these questions resolutely. Why should I try to connect Edward's actions with that idiotic nightmare? And then I fell to thinking of all I had ever heard of dreams that had come true, and wondering whether other prophetic dreams were half as real-seeming as this one of mine, to which no importance was to be attached. And the east quickened, and the birds woke. I turned and looked at my husband by the chill light. He was asleep—looking very tired and

anxious, but with no change on his face such as —— But what was I thinking about?"

Then came common sense, and whispered: "You little simpleton, you don't deserve so good a husband. Your love is a bad sentry if it cannot keep out such midsummer madness as this."

By the time the full sun-light had filled the room I was almost ready to laugh at myself for thinking twice about such nonsense; but I was, all the same, so much ashamed of the vague imaginings that dream had engendered, that I would not for worlds have told Edward a word about it.

"I'm afraid I was rather growly last night," said Edward at breakfast; "but I really was quite knocked up with my long walk."

"I was disgracefully cross, myself," I admitted, handing him his coffee, "but I missed you so all the evening. Long separations don't seem to agree with either of us."

"What do you say to sauntering about a little in these parts before we go on to Carlisle, Mary? It's a very pretty country and it's much nicer being by ourselves than with anyone else."

"Of course it is," I admitted; "but, my dear Edward, we have written to the Westlakes to say we're coming."

"Then write again and say long railway journeys don't agree with me, and that we can only reach them by easy stages. And as I haven't half explored Calverley yet, shall we stay here a day or two? This seems a nice, comfortable hotel."

"Oh no," I answered with a shudder; "let us get out of this. A little of Caverley goes a long way." And so it happened that the same day found us at the Royal Hart, Branscombe.

The Royal Hart, Branscombe, was a magnificent model of all that an inn ought not to be. The landlord and servants seemed alike to look upon the guests as personal enemies, to be harassed, worried, and made miserable by every means in their power.

But in spite of all discomforts I spent a much pleasanter evening than at the well-appointed "Calverley Arms." Edward seemed quite himself again, and I myself felt in my usual spirits. This sudden scheme of rambling through the pleasant district of mid-England, in the height of summer, was delightful to me. It would be like a wedding tour, a second honeymoon, I said.

We wandered about in the woods all the evening, and I was so tired that I dropped asleep directly my head touched the pillow.

How long had I been asleep? I woke, shivering with fear. For, incredible as it may seem, the terrible experience of the night before had been repeated, to every smallest detail. Again the river, the bridge, the lovers, the sudden splash and cry, and then the face of my husband turned towards me with that frantic horror on it!

This time I did not cry out, only drew my breath quickly and lay rigid, unable to move or speak, though I knew, somehow, that Edward was awake.

"Now then, Mary," he said tenderly. "Nightmares again? What a start you gave!"

His voice broke the spell. "Oh dear," I said, "I don't think travelling agrees with me. I never had such dreams before."

And then I lay silent, thinking how strangely that first dream must have affected me, for it to have reproduced itself thus exactly. I couldn't tell Edward *now* about it, because he would wonder so why I hadn't told him yesterday. So I held my tongue, and when I had listened for some time to the regular breathing that told me he was asleep, I too, dropped into unconsciousness: an unconsciousness which was broken by no more dreams.

For the next week we wandered about from one charming spot to another. "Where are your roses?" said my husband, one morning. "They don't seem to flourish in this English air."

They did not, indeed. Though I was young, though my husband seemed to adore me, though we were spending our days in the loveliest English country, I was beginning to feel that my life was hardly worth having. Most of us have had the same dream twice over; but, reader, has it ever happened to you to dream the same dream, and that a horror too deep for description, for seven consecutive nights?

That is what had befallen me. That was what was driving the colour from my cheeks and the light from my eyes. Every night I met this vision; every night I woke, feeling as if it were all true; every morning the relief of daylight was less, and the sense of misery—and misery not without reason—was stronger. I simply could not tell Edward, just *because* I suffered so; and after the first two nights I did not even tell him I had been dreaming—though he was never asleep when I woke.

On the eighth day we reached Annersley. The inn was full of excursionists, and the only rooms we could get were two tiny apartments, with the width of the house between them. I felt a little uneasy when I went to bed. My nerves were beginning to suffer from the strain of this nightly terror. How should I feel when I woke, as—as I knew I should—with that vision still before my eyes—in that little room alone? I did not like to think of it.

When I awoke, the whole room was full of the strong sunlight that streamed through the uncurtained window. I had had a fair, full, perfect night of sleep. The enchantment was over. The spell was broken. *The dream had not come.*

Oh, the relief of that waking. To feel that the torture was over, that the vision, with its maddening air of reality, had ceased to visit me! I went downstairs humming a tune.

"What a lovely day—what a pretty place," I said to Edward. Everything seemed rose-coloured to me.

"You're looking like yourself again," he returned. "Shall we stay here another day, Mary?"

"Oh, yes," I said eagerly. That was a happy day!

In the evening we were sitting at the end of the inn garden. It was an intensely still evening; still with the hush that comes before a storm; the sort of hush that makes people say there is electricity in the air. There were green trees in the garden, and long grass—and under a grey old lichen-covered apple tree was the wooden seat on which we were sitting. The birds were quite silent, and into our talk a silence came presently, as on such evenings silences do come. I slipped my hand into my husband's, and we sat there quietly. I was utterly at peace, and filled with a sense of rest and contentment such as I had not known since we left Australia. There is nothing in the world so delicious as silence—where there is perfect sympathy.

I did not fall asleep. No; I am quite sure of that. There was no half-conscious interval—no drowsy interlude. Straight from that fair inn garden which had seemed to me like a little paradise, I was taken back to my dream-spot, that wood by the river. Presently the two figures came along again, and the old scene was enacted with that terrible newness that had characterized its every representation. I never knew—as one does sometimes—that I had seen it before. It always had a horrible unexpectedness about it. It was only when I woke that the knowledge of *how often* I had seen it used to come upon me, and add to the tortures I had to bear.

After the climax, I found myself in the garden seat, Edward's hand in mine, and such a deadly sensation of weakness, exhaustion, and utter prostration, as I had never felt in all my healthy life. When I spoke, my voice sounded like some one else's.

"Edward—I am tired. Let us go in."

"All right," he answered. "Why—what's the matter, Mary? You look like a little ghost!"

"I'm tired of moving about. I cannot keep it up. Let us go on to the Westlakes."

"Very well. You certainly are not looking yourself, and I shall take you to a doctor directly we reach Carlisle. I must take care of my Australian lily."

"Shall I write to-night?" I said, eager for any change.

"Yes, if you like! Why, what a miserable little face! You're soon tired of your second honeymoon, Mary!"

"It isn't that," I said feebly, cut to the heart by this reproach. Was it my fancy, or had his voice altered, as well as his face, in this last week. "It isn't that; but I do feel ill, Edward, and I think I should like to see a doctor."

And I went indoors to write my letter to the Westlakes.

Having written it, I sat by the open window waiting for Edward to come in from the garden and tell me the exact address. I sat scribbling on an odd half-sheet of paper. I have some little skill at catching likenesses—and presently a very fair sketch of my husband's face lay before me. Then the busy pen went on scratching, guided, I do believe, by the Imp of the Perverse, and a companion portrait appeared.

A girl with a handsome face, and head thrown back defiantly. I was touching up the lines of the shoulder and neck, when the window was darkened by Edward, who, leaning through the roses and ivy, took the paper from my hand.

"Who are you caricaturing now?" he said. "You really ——"

He stopped short. Was that look on his face not a faint reflex of the dream-look?

"Who is this?" he asked in quite an altered tone.

A strange sinking at my heart kept me silent for a minute. Then I said in almost as constrained a voice as his:

"Only a fancy head. I don't know why I drew it?"

Did he know I was not telling him the exact truth? He said no more, only his hand trembled as he picked up the letter I had written, and read it through.

No vision came to me that night, for I never closed my eyes. That look of my husband's, when he saw the "fancy head" was infinitely more terrible to me than all that gone before. For it was *real*, at least, whatever the dream scene might be; and one fact it established beyond doubt: Winifred was not unknown to him. There was such a person. And what a light this threw on his conduct! His staying at Calverley—his going out—everything, in fact, that had happened there, now bore a fresh and fearful interpretation. Oh, what an eternity of agony can be compressed into one short summer night!

Calverley was the nearest main line station, and thither we returned next day. The journey was made hateful by the sense of *apartness*, which must be felt before the misery of it can be even imagined. We just missed the Carlisle train we went for; the next did not pass through till ten o'clock, so we had to spend six hours at Calverley. I never saw Edward so annoyed. He vowed vengeance against all the officials, at the trains, at the time-tables, and at what he called our bad luck. I had never seen him really angry and my doing so now did not tend to make matters more pleasant between us.

"I suppose we must go to the hotel," he said, when his anger showed signs of giving out. "We can't spend half-a-dozen hours on this confounded platform."

I shuddered when I saw again the place where first my trouble had come upon me.

We had dinner. I don't think either of us eat much—and then I said: "I am going out, Edward."

"Do you wish to go alone?" he asked.

"Not at all."

"I don't feel disposed to go out," he went on, "and you had better not overtire yourself."

"I must go, Edward," I said. "I feel that I cannot stay in the house."

My going out was not a mere caprice. I felt that the clue to that dream-tragedy was to be found at Calverley. Edward's unusual anger

had settled that point, and I was determined to make use of this delay which had been forced upon us, walk through and round the place, in the effort to find out something. So out I went. At the door Edward overtook me.

"I don't like your walking alone, Mary," he said. "We ought to keep together."

"*You* went out alone the last time we were here," I replied, trying to force a laugh, "but I've no objection to your coming with me."

So we walked down the High Street silently, and a little apart.

"Where are you wandering?" he asked by-and-by.

"I want to see the waterfall by the wooden bridge," I answered, almost involuntarily, looking down as I spoke.

"How do you know there's a wooden bridge here at all?"

"Didn't you tell me so?"

"No —" very curtly.

"Ah!" with a fine affectation of indifference. "I suppose I must have dreamt it ——"

"Did you dream the way there as well?"

"No, but I'll ask it of this man," and I went up to a passing labourer. "Can you tell me whether there is a wooden bridge over the river, near a waterfall?"

I had felt irresistibly impelled to ask the question, but I was hardly prepared for the answer.

"Oh, yes, ma'am. Go straight through the town, and then turn over the stile into the Meads, and follow the path. You can't miss it."

We walked on. The silence presently became unbearable, and we plunged into such talk as goes on between mere acquaintances; talk characterised by a terrible politeness. My heart was aching at it all. What was in *his* heart? I would not let myself wonder.

We found the Meads, and over the stile we went. In a moment I knew that the scene, at least, of my dream was real, for the whole picture was before me exactly as I had seen it. Then I stopped short, and turned to my husband.

"Come," I said, "and stand by the bridge at that corner."

My mind was made up. Even if eternal parting were to follow, I would tell him now what was in my mind. I would say—Here are all as I saw them before—bridge, wood, path, water—and you: where is the girl?

"Come, Edward," I repeated, "and stand as I tell you."

"What nonsense," he said; "have you gone mad, Mary?"

"Heaven knows: perhaps I have; but stand there you must."

"Anything to humour you," he answered. His face was white and set; his lips were closed tightly. In his eyes was a sort of bewildered misery, the look of one who receives a blow from a hand he loves, and cannot either understand or resent it.

Suddenly, before I could begin my tale or ask my question, his whole face changed—grew glad—the look of misery vanished—fled

away. Nay, more. The tired, troubled look, the shadow that had darkened it for the last ten days, was gone. I followed the direction of his eyes.

Merciful heaven! Was this another dream? Was it all a dream?

Coming along the path, as I had seen them before, were two figures. The girl whose face I had sketched, and, beside her—not Edward; *he* was standing close to me—but Edward's face, his figure, his walk. Was it Edward's ghost? Was Edward right, and had I gone mad? Was that what it had all driven me to? They drew nearer. Then my husband sprang towards the other Edward, who made an answering movement, and their right hands clasped each other fast.

I saw nothing more. I suppose I fainted.

When I came to myself I was on that same sofa in the Calverley Arms which has been mentioned before. Bending over me was the face that had so haunted and tortured me.

"This is our future sister-in-law," said Edward presently, "and my brother is waiting to see you, as soon as you are well enough. It's all right; we'll explain things presently, Mary."

"I didn't know you had a brother," I returned, faintly.

"Oh well, I have, you see. Will, come and speak to my wife."

That night Edward and I made mutual confession, and in bitterest shame and humiliation, I sobbed out all my story. Then Edward told his tale, and I learned that his brother, William Norreys, had been a ne'er-do-weel, and such a disgrace to the family that Edward had chosen not to mention him. It was a little weak of him, was it not, to think my love for him could be changed by his having a good-for-nothing twin brother? His wish to stop at Calverley, he could not explain; it was an impulse for which he could not account. When he went out that first evening he had witnessed that scene between Winifred and his brother, just as I had dreamed it. The horror of the whole thing had completely unmanned him, and, without waiting to try and rescue the girl, he had turned and torn his way through the brambles and woody undergrowth (ah, I knew what that felt like). He had felt that he had been a coward, and that, almost as much as the other reasons, had kept him from telling me.

Had his manhood stood him good another half minute, he would have seen his brother rush down stream, dash in, and bring the girl to the bank, and then all this agony would have been spared us both. He would never have thought his brother was a murderer, and I should never have believed—ah, don't ask me *what.*

All the same you are not to suppose that *I* consider Edward a coward; that was only his way of putting it. It was simply his physical weakness that was to blame; you know he was never strong. Can you wonder that in the relief of knowing that his brother was innocent, my husband should have forgotten and forgiven all old scenes, and have sprung forward to greet him?

Poor Will! his mad jealousy, in pushing Winifred into the stream had really been the best advocate of his cause. He very effectually persuaded her of the sincerity of his passion, at any rate, and I believe their betrothal was settled before they had been out of the water three minutes.

The history of their love does not concern this story. William Norreys was clerk in the factory above mentioned: and this girl was governess in the house of the chief partner, and able to grace her husband's position, when soon after, by the means of substantial help from my husband, he became third partner in the firm.

William was only so *very* like Edward by *moonlight.* In the daytime he does not look nearly so handsome.

And how about my dream? There is very little to tell. I only learned that every time this vision had come to me, my husband had been widely, vividly awake, and had had the whole scene intensely present before his mind. Not an explanation? No, I suppose not. Yet one hears now-a-days of all sorts of thought-reading, though my only experience of it took place years ago, before it became fashionable.

FABIAN BLAND.

MY PICTURE GALLERY.

'Tis no oaken panelled room with art treasures hung,
Lovely fabled haunts whose charms olden poets sung;
Quaintly robed and powdered dames fitly set in antique frames.

Painted shepherds tend no flocks 'mid arcadian bowers,
Nor with mimic wreath and lyre smile away the hours:
One fair landscape, one alone, only can I call my own.

'Tis a cottage vine-festooned, on a rising ground,
Leafy woodlands shadow it, roses bloom around;
Clear and bright its streamlets run, dimpling, sparkling, in the sun.

There my happy youth was spent, there my childhood played,
When sweet ties and kindred hearts earth an Eden made:
Memory is the golden key of love's picture gallery.

Portraits line its silent walls, each one in its place,
And the true and tender eyes of each angel face
That has looked its last below, follow me where'er I go.

Earthly sunbeams pass it by, never down it shine,
Yet to me each picture glows with a light divine,
As I tread its lonely floor, enter its enchanted door. J. I. L.

M. ELLEN STAPLES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

TO SEE HIM TAKE IT LIKE THIS, FRIGHTENED HER MORE THAN ALL.

THE ARGOSY.

APRIL, 1885.

THE MYSTERY OF ALLAN GRALE.

CHAPTER XIII.

NOT ASKED TO BE WITNESSES.

IN the day-time of Monday, the nineteenth of October, Mrs. Wilson, the worthy and angular and precise landlady of the lodging house in Great Grey Street, Chelsea, found herself in a very ruffled temper.

And yet, what right had she to be angry? For several things had happened to her which bring pleasure to the natural feminine heart. She had just been one in a wedding party—that perennial human interest—she had on a handsome new dress—and she was relieved finally from a sense of responsibility and anxiety concerning Rose Raynham which had lurked within her for the last few weeks, despite her best endeavours to allay it.

Yet still Mrs. Wilson felt herself an ill-used woman, and was thoroughly vexed; and in a spirit of sophistry she was trying to find good reasons for being so, in the negligences of her servant and the patent thoughtlessness of some of her lodgers.

But these subterfuges deceive nobody. They did not deceive her. Mrs. Wilson judged her servant to be but a stupid girl; but the girl was shrewd enough to know "that it must have been something which happened at church which had put the missis out: she was pleasant enough before she went to the wedding, but she came back from it as cross as two sticks."

After that first visit which Mr. Forester had paid to Great Grey Street, the landlady had had terrible misgivings. For the gentleman did not return so promptly as he had promised, though he wrote to her as well as to Miss Raynham, saying that he was detained by unexpected and pressing causes. These letters were dated from the Iron Cross Hotel, though they bore a country postmark which was too indistinct for Mrs. Wilson to make out. Certainly he enclosed a

very fair remittance, and made the request that Mrs. Wilson would allow the young orphan lady to be with her as a boarder rather than as a lodger. The money was welcome enough to the struggling woman, but it did not silence her qualms and self-questionings. Not only was she careful of her own fair fame, and desirous that no harm should befall Rose under her roof, but she was honestly anxious that no harm should befall the girl anywhere. And so she had awaited further developments with much anxiety, and while she acceded to Mr. Forester's request concerning Rose's position in her house, she still held somewhat aloof from the girl, and lost no conversational opportunity of impressing upon her the solemnity of life, and the dreadful wickedness of the world.

But Mr. Forester had not failed on his part. At his very next visit he spoke of the marriage as imminent: at the visit following he actually began to make arrangements for it. Rose was just over twenty-one, so that as far as the law was concerned she was her own mistress, and no banns would be required—nothing but the genteel formality of a licence.

Mrs. Wilson was asked to advise and help concerning a modest trousseau, and as the days wore on, nearer to the day which was fixed for the marriage, Rose, who had been chatty and sociable from the first, grew franker and more communicative concerning her own affairs, though her confidences were naturally coloured by her own feelings and vanities. She talked quite unreservedly about her dead mother, and her childhood's home, and her "grandpapa, the artist." Concerning later years she went less into detail, but Mrs. Wilson got a fairly vivid impression of a childless, unsympathetic uncle-guardian, and an old-established bountiful country home. Good Joseph Raynham, of the quiet Ash-tree Inn, would have been quite startled at the stern and worldly character his niece gave as his portrait, and possibly still more bewildered at the mysterious way in which his "Ash-tree" lost all those particular features which made it an inn, and retained only those of a country house!

Mrs. Wilson thought she caught the drift of the whole story. The girl might have a little money of her own: at any rate she was pretty and attractive, the sort of girl whose relatives expect her to make what they consider "a good match." She hinted at this.

"But my uncle had no right to have his doubts of Mr. Forester because he is only an artist," pouted Rose in answer, "when my own grandpapa was an artist."

And Mrs. Wilson cordially agreed with her. But while the good woman allowed herself to be led by Rose's vanity into believing that the objections to the marriage, and therefore the reasons for secresy, came from Rose's own side, she never for a moment doubted which of the pair had enjoyed the best social breeding; and she constantly impressed upon Rose that indeed money was not everything, that Mr. Forester was a perfect gentleman, and that when once his pictures

got into notice the great world who would patronise all things would certainly recognise him as their equal.

"And what will my uncle say then?" asked Rose, with a toss of her light pretty head.

There was not to be any friend from either side at the marriage. The parish clerk would give the bride away. Mrs. Wilson herself and one of her lodgers, a Miss North, a lively little music teacher, were pressed into service as companions to keep the bride in countenance.

But on the evening before the ceremony, a strange change seemed to come over the light heedless spirit of the bride-elect. Mr. Forester paid her a long visit, and their little preparations being all complete, the two had had an earnest and uninterrupted conversation. It happened that he went away at last without seeing Mrs. Wilson; and when she entered the parlour after his departure, she found Rose sitting there, pale and tearful, with a solemn light shining on her face. She did not make any remark, but she rose and kissed the kind landlady—a caress she had never before bestowed on her.

"Aye, I know how you feel, my dear," said the good woman. "You wish it was to-morrow morning, and that it was all over, and yet you wish you had another two or three weeks to consider it. Not that you don't trust him, I'm sure, my dear, but that it's a great change, and can't ever be undone once it is done."

"I—I'm a little frightened, I think," whispered Rose. "I'm only a poor little thing—such a silly little thing, uncle Joseph used to say!"

"But just what satisfies Mr. Forester," said Mrs. Wilson cheerily. "And as for being a silly little thing—love teaches us all wisdom fast enough, my dear. Love is a teacher who spares no pains."

Rose did not answer. Perhaps there was something upon her mind which was beyond the reach of the homely consolation.

"Is it not strange?" she asked presently, "that to-night, of all nights, I cannot help thinking of my uncle and the dear old place?"

"Not a bit strange," answered the landlady. "It's natural to take a long last look of anything. You'll never see your old life again, my dear. Your own eyes will be changed."

"I wonder," said Rose, speaking slowly and sadly, "I wonder if I shall ever wish that this had never happened!"

"Of course not," cried Mrs. Wilson, loyal to the happiness of marriage. "It won't be all sunshine, my dear, I don't say that it will. We wouldn't wish it—light and shade, my dear, and calm and storm; but the sun will be always there. And when you're an old woman, my dear young lady, and have seen the best and the worst, you'll say that this is the one action of your life that you'd do over again—may be, in a little different way, for I can't help being sorry that you're not reconciled to your uncle. But so long as life is life here will be rubs in it, and nothing is quite perfect!"

Rose gave a little wistful incredulous shake of the head. She had a great secret to keep now, and she was not quite certain that Mrs. Wilson's assurances would suit its requirements.

"I'm as glad as I can be that this wedding is coming off," confided Mrs. Wilson to Miss North, as next morning they assisted each other to dress for the occasion. "And the uncle must come round by-and-by, for I'm sure if this young man is only a poor artist, he's a perfect gentleman, and a great deal better man than she had any right to expect, pretty light little butterfly as she is."

"She looks like a butterfly in the rain, this morning," said Miss North.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Wilson, "there's a sort of dignity about her, all on a sudden. I can't make it out; there's half of it like humility and half of it like pride."

"As if she feels unworthy of him and yet is made worthy by his choice," explained Miss North, who was romantic.

And then the two had betaken themselves to admire their new dresses, for simple as all the arrangements were, Mr. Forester had not forgotten the liberality becoming in a bridegroom, and Mrs. Wilson's dark-grey cashmere, trimmed with satin, and Miss North's corresponding robe of olive-green, were, as each said, exactly what each would have chosen for herself.

Miss North secretly pitied Rose for being married in a travelling dress, handsome enough of its kind, but very different from the fluffy white garments which figure in girlish visions of a bride. When Mr. Forester had first expressed his wishes in this respect, Rose had felt inclined to be a little rebellious; but before the wedding-day, the matter had ceased to be very important in her eyes, and she scarcely cared whether or no he would yield to Miss North's earnest petition that he would at least permit a bridal wreath to adorn the dainty straw bonnet, which she would faithfully promise to remove at once—even in the vestry, immediately after the ceremony if he so desired.

The wedding took place in a quiet old church by the waterside—a church with quaint monuments in every corner, and strange relics on every hand. When it was over, they came back to Great Grey Street, only to take up the trunk stored with Rose's little trousseau. Mrs. Wilson had set forth sundry refreshments, which Rose made a feint of accepting; but the bridegroom touched nothing.

Their cab was directed to drive to the King's Cross Railway Station. It was before this parting moment—as the observant maid-of-all-work discerned—that the chill had fallen on the kindly landlady. In fact, she brought it home with her from the church. But when Rose had turned to her on the threshold, and clasped her hands, and gazed up into her face with tearful eyes, she thawed for a moment, and returned the clinging grasp with warm heartiness, as she spoke.

"And you'll let me know when you're safely arrived, my dear, and

I'll always be glad to hear from you, or to see you, whenever you're in town again."

"You must always believe that I can never forget you, Mrs. Wilson, or your kindness, or the days here," answered Rose, and then Mr. Forester put his hand through her arm and hurried her off.

"Well, well," said Mrs. Wilson, turning back into the deserted parlour, "I'm not sure that it's all as right as it should be. He does not seem happy with the happiness he ought to feel this day; and there's a change come over her."

"It's natural, isn't it, a change should come over one when one marries?" remarked Miss North.

"Ah!" cried the landlady significantly. "Did anything about the wedding strike you as curious, my dear?"

"No; nothing. I'm not much used to be at weddings, Mrs. Wilson."

"Well, it struck me—and it was this. Neither you nor I was allowed to witness their signatures in the vestry. Instead of us, he asked the two strangers to be the witnesses—mere officials—the old beadle and the pew-opener. My dear," continued the landlady, in quite a sepulchral tone, "I don't believe he is what he seems, or that his name's Forester. I think he is a nobleman in disguise."

Little Miss North gave a scream of surprise.

"The impression has got hold of me," said Mrs. Wilson. "And I shouldn't wonder but he disclosed it to her last evening at their long interview, for I'm sure she did not suspect it before, and it is that which has dazed and changed her. They are married at any rate, which is the chief thing."

"My goodness!" cried Miss North, adopting the opinion. "I did notice something—sorry enough though she was to leave you, Mrs. Wilson, she never gave the promise to write which you asked her for."

"You may be sure I took notice of that as well as you," rejoined the landlady. "Well, it's a queer world. It's the queerest world that ever I saw," she added, as if her experience in universes had been extensive. And then she proceeded to set her house in order, and was in capital cue for administering any rebukes which seemed to be called for.

CHAPTER XIV.

WITH MR. GRALE.

Dr. Palmer stood outside his house, inhaling the fresh air of the bright autumn morning. He was about to take his usual round of visits, and had halted in thought. There was one patient whom it was necessary he should see the first thing; he knew that, and did not hesitate; and there was another whose case was not so urgent, whom perhaps he ought to see; but this latter lived in a totally

opposite direction from that in which he wished to go for reasons of his own.

It was Tuesday the twentieth of October. On the previous evening Dr. Palmer had heard of the return to Dering of the master of Moorland House, Webster having mentioned it to the Doctor and Miss Vivian when he overtook them in his chaise on coming from the railway station : he had seen Mr. Grale alight from the train.

While the Doctor stood on his doorstep, ruminating, his daughter Agnes came out from the breakfast-room.

"Are you waiting for anything, papa?" she asked. "Have you forgotten something?"

"No, child: I was only deliberating whether I might go to old Grale at the Mill and tackle him, before going to Mrs. Enderby's. I suppose I must put aside the inclination; business before pleasure."

"Pleasure!" echoed Agnes.

Dr. Palmer laughed. "It's a proverb, you know."

"And in one sense it will be a pleasure to tell him how infamous are his suspicions of Charles Carr," said Agnes warmly.

"Softly, young lady," said her father: "Mr. Grale may have thought his suspicions were justified."

"Papa, he could never have thought his harshness was justified," returned Agnes.

"No," assented Dr. Palmer, as he moved away. "I shall try to show him it was not."

The Doctor visited his two patients whose cases pressed, and then made his way to the works. He had really come in a conciliatory spirit and to see how far the matter might be made right. Mr. Grale had been absent three weeks and it was time an understanding should be come to for Charles's sake. The Doctor had in his pocket the suspected roll of manuscript, to be triumphantly produced should Mr. Grale hold out. But when he was requested to wait awhile in the outer counting house, and could overhear Mr. Grale's rasping and dictatorial tones within, the conciliating spirit fainted within him and was only kept alive by persistent endeavour.

Mr. Grale gave a grunt when he saw who his visitor was. His manner could be very offensive at times. But Dr. Palmer had made up his mind to carry the matter through with a light, strong hand, as if he could fearlessly rely on the manufacturer's neighbourliness and honest openness to conviction.

They sat down together, Mr. Grale partly turning from his desk, and talked for a little while. But Dr. Palmer soon found his task would be a hard one.

"You see," said he presently, "Charles does not even know of what he is accused."

Mr. Grale looked up keenly beneath his shaggy eyebrows. "I accuse him of nothing yet," he said. "I only tell him—I tell you—that I gave him a chance of confessing what he knows should be confessed."

"Which, as he is innocent of everything, means nothing at all," rejoined Dr. Palmer. "Remember what stress you laid on the imitation envelope you found; yet it was merely a spoilt specimen of a trifling art with which he has amused himself quite openly. George Vivian remembers Charles doing something of the sort for Miss Vivian's stall at the last bazaar."

"What! have you been talking it over with the Vivians?" questioned Mr. Grale, in a quick, angry tone.

"It was your son who mentioned it to them, Mr. Grale. I was sorry for it, for the less the matter is spoken of abroad the better; but I think we may trust them. I only answered a few natural questions that Edgar put."

"Allan is—a fool," decided his father concisely. "What business had he to talk? It's no affair of his."

"You may take my word for it, Mr. Grale, that Charles Carr is as innocent as you are. I regret, as things have turned out, that he did not show you at once that roll of manuscript you thought so suspicious. I have it with me now, and you can read it if you care to take the trouble. What shall I say to Charles for you, sir?"

Mr. Grale sat with his pen suspended in his hand. He was turning something over in his mind.

"What is done cannot be undone," he said. "I expect there will be no redress for me; that I shall not get back the money I've been defrauded of. And really I am so busy with important matters this morning that I've no time to waste with you. But you, Dr. Palmer, can ask him if he objects to telling what he knows of a Mr. Mark Bedell, and where he is now."

"Mark Bedell!" echoed the doctor, recalling the one perplexing point.

"Yes," said Mr. Grale. "I expect, if you opened that roll of manuscript you say you have brought, that's about the first name you'd see in it."

Dr. Palmer saw he must speak without reserve if he would do any good. Drawing his chair nearer, he confessed that Mr. Wilton had mentioned the name to him in confidence; and that Charles had declared he knew nothing wrong of it. "It is simply a tale of fiction that the roll of paper contains," he added, "and the name Mark Bedell was one created out of Charles's head."

"Do you give credit to that?" rejoined Mr. Grale sharply. "It is the name of the forger; the one he makes use of, at all events. You must see that there's more in this coincidence than Charles Carr wishes to make out."

"I acknowledge that it is perplexing," said the Doctor, "but I am quite sure Charles is both ignorant and innocent."

"It is so perplexing that I would rather not go further into the affair just now; I must have time to sift it thoroughly—if I can do that. I will tell you this much—that I should never have suspected the young

man but for seeing the name in his desk. There it was, in his own handwriting; he can't get over that. Give me time, Dr. Palmer."

"Have you the false bills and cheques by you, Mr. Grale? If so, do you object to let me see them?"

"Certainly not," answered Mr. Grale, taking them from his desk and putting them into the Doctor's hand.

There they were, bills and uncrossed cheques—payable to Mark Bedell, or order. In every instance the name of Mark Bedell was written across the back. They had all been paid within a very few days of each other, though in widely different places. The forged signatures of Grale and Company were so perfect that Mr. Grale himself could not wonder the cashiers had never questioned them.

"Give me time," repeated Mr. Grale. "I'll sift it if I can."

"Meanwhile you will allow Charles Carr to return to his employment here?"

"No, that I won't," was the resolute answer.

"Of course I mean only as a temporary thing; Charles never intended to stay here, you know, sir, and I am sure he would not now. But, any scandal that may have arisen against him in the neighbourhood will be recognised for what it is worth, when it is seen that immediately on your coming back he returns to his desk, even though it be for ever so short a time."

"No, no," said Mr. Grale, with harsh decision. "He would not show me those papers when I asked him, and when it was his duty to do so; he need not come back now. Let things stand as they are for the present. Nothing is cleared up. I did not dismiss him. I shall certainly not call him back."

"Dr. Palmer took up his hat. "Well," said he, "I am sorry for Charles, yet I'm far more sorry for you, Mr. Grale. Good morning."

He hurried to Dering Court, for the General was the next patient on his list, in a perfect ecstasy of righteous indignation. Maria Vivian was in the garden, and came forward to meet him.

"Mr. Grale is inexorably unjust," he impulsively announced to her, forgetting all other greeting. And then he briefly related to her a small portion of what had passed concerning Charles Carr; but he did not give particulars, or allude in any way to the name Mark Bedell, contenting himself with enlarging upon his adversary's prejudice and "hardness."

Rather to his surprise, Maria seemed inclined to excuse Mr. Grale. She offered a sort of apology for him.

"He has only just got home, you see, Doctor, and is no doubt overwhelmed with business. And of course he feels sore at being wronged—he has been wronged, you know, and robbed of his money. Allow him a little time to get over the smart, and to enquire into things. I dare say it will come right in the end."

Dr. Palmer said no more. Perhaps she was right. He enquired after the General.

"He seems wonderfully better this morning," replied Maria. "So much so that it has made me almost afraid. For—is not a sudden improvement sometimes a sign of the end?"

"Sometimes, but by no means always," answered the Doctor. "And I may tell you that this is about the time when, if a change for the better be possible, it is likely to show itself. I confess that I had little hopes of it. There have been some most unfavourable symptoms in his case. However, we shall see. If a medical attendant's hopes often come to nothing, so occasionally do his fears."

"Certainly," assented Maria.

"Is your brother George at home?"

"No," she answered. "He has been in town for three or four days now, as I think you know. I rather wonder what can be keeping him. He never stays so long as this. Perhaps he may be home to-night."

"He seems rather fond of being in town," remarked the Doctor.

"Yes; and I cannot think why," said Maria. "He is not happy; I am sure of that. Oh, Dr. Palmer! if I could only know that his health is not in danger?"

"But, my dear young lady, you should not let that fear trouble you. I really do not see any cause for it. George is not very strong; he never has been, as we all know. But there's nothing specially the matter with him now."

"Something or other is weighing upon his spirits."

"That may be. Young men have their seasons of torments and worries, just as all the rest of us have. I'm going in to the General."

"A moment yet, Doctor," said Maria, touching his arm to detain him, and insensibly lowering her voice. "I want to ask you a trifling question. The woman that Mrs. Massey was speaking of last evening—she who wears the yellow cloak—do you know anything of her?"

"Not I," said Dr. Palmer.

"You don't know who she is, or what brought her to the place, or what she is doing here?"

"Not at all. I have heard some of my patients talk of her. They call her the yellow woman," he added, laughing slightly, "and seem to think she must be watching something or somebody. She is seen sheltering herself behind trees and hedges, peeping out upon the passers-by."

"I wonder," mused Maria, speaking to herself rather than to the Doctor, "what she is here for?"

"Why do you want to know?"

Maria flashed a quick glance at him. "Oh, curiosity," she answered, turning her head away. The unexpected appearance of the woman the previous night, and the warning word she had spoken—though whether for Allan or for herself she knew not—had impressed her with a vague uneasiness. But she shrank from speaking of it."

"You'd like to ask for the pattern of her yellow cloak perhaps?" laughed Dr. Palmer, as he left Maria and passed into the house.

He found General Vivian's condition undoubtedly improved. At the close of his visit to the sick-room, not seeing Maria about, he charged Edgar to tell his sister that it was a real improvement; "though," quaintly added the Doctor, "we are not quite out of the wood."

Edgar saw Dr. Palmer depart, and then went about, looking for Maria. He found her in a little half-ruined arbour in the heart of a thick shrubbery. It had been his own retreat in many a youthful trouble, and over and over again Maria had run in to comfort him, and kiss away his sadness.

Pushing aside the growth of intervening branches, he saw Maria sitting on the dusty, worm-eaten seat. There was on her white face a strange look which he did not understand, nor did he pause to consider it.

"Maria!" he cried, "the uncle is better. Dr. Palmer says he may get over it after all, and you are not to be uneasy."

She rose up silently and stood before him, raising a hand as if in solemn thankfulness; but Edgar noticed that she did not answer his radiant smile. Something was troubling her. Maria sat down again, and a few minutes passed in silence.

"Edgar," she began, apparently making a great effort, "Do you remember how often you and I have taken counsel together in this dim old place?"

"Aye," he answered, the light of his face changing to a tender one. He could see that she was inwardly distressed, and the anxiety concerning her evident depression of spirits, which had lain dormant during his uncle's imminent danger, promptly returned to his mind. "Aye," he repeated, "and it was always good counsel which you gave, sister mine; sometimes too good for me to appreciate or follow at the time."

"It was easy to give you counsel in those days, Edgar. In childhood problems are very simple; our difficulties then are easily overcome. But it is different when we grow older; molehills then are mountains, not only in semblance; our lives have become complicated with other lives —— It is a very perplexing world!" she broke off suddenly.

"Sit down beside me, dear," said Edgar, who had taken his place on the bench, "and tell me all about it. I can see that your mind has some burden weighing it down, from which it ought to be relieved."

"What is there to tell?" she faltered. Nevertheless she sat down beside him. As she did so, a withered leaf fluttered down and fell in her lap.

"Edgar!" she said suddenly, after a pause of a few minutes, "do you think one is ever free to divulge a secret?"

Edgar felt that some outer door of his sister's heart was opening, by which she longed that he might be gradually admitted into the whole history of what was troubling her. He no longer thought it could be connected with the lovers' quarrel which had occurred between her and Allan Grale; if it were but that, why surely they would do as other lovers did, "kiss, and make it up," now that it was rendering both of them so evidently miserable. He could not imagine what it could be. Was it anything about George? For Edgar himself had found his elder brother curiously absent-minded and restless of late; and George's unexplained absences at this time of dangerous illness in the house were in themselves mysterious. But how could Maria know anything? Yet Edgar said to himself that women did often seem to have a sort of sixth sense, which gave them power to see the significance and bearing of apparent trifles, and to trace home very trivial clues. Or could it be about himself? Some rumour of his difficulties falsified, distorted, or at least exaggerated, might have reached her.

"That is not an easy question, my dear," he answered. "A secret you see, is intended to be kept."

Her lip quivered. As she glanced up at her brother, he caught a look in her eyes that was very like agony.

"I suppose it is quite the same, Edgar, if a secret is trusted with one, or if one finds it out," she observed.

"It has seemed to me that the last sort of secret should be the more faithfully kept," replied Edgar, his impression becoming strengthened that the secret must be George's—and that she had found it out. "Once a fellow creature's secret gets put in our power —without his will, possibly without his knowledge—why, then, our own honour is concerned to guard it. Besides, our 'finding-out' faculties may be at fault, and the inferences we have drawn from appearances may be wrong ones."

"But—if we may be quite sure that—that they are right?" urged Maria.

"It is very hard to be quite sure," returned Edgar, firmly.

"And the secret may be one which we have no right to keep; something that other people ought to know of," pleaded Miss Vivian.

"The straightforward course is to tell our discovery—our secret— to the one whom it most concerns, and to ask for an explanation, if he can give one, and if he can't, to allow him a chance of himself disclosing it at his own time. We need not think what our own duties of disclosure may be until we are entirely assured he repudiates his."

Edgar Vivian delivered this opinion with rather stern authority. He felt quite convinced now that Maria's words applied to something she had found out, or thought she had found out, about his brother, or else about himself. He had no fancy for entering upon his own

difficulties with her, or for listening to any of George's. But he saw that his want of sympathy gave her pain.

"You see, I am talking in the dark, Maria," he resumed, in a kindly tone, "there are a thousand little circumstances surrounding every particular case which must modify an outsider's view of it. You won't be angry with me when I say I can't help inferring that you yourself are keeping a secret."

"Aye, I am," she said bitterly.

"And unwillingly, I fancy."

"No, not unwillingly," she answered. "It has been as a black shadow on my life from the day I knew it, but if it could have rested there, it should have been let lie in silence. Why should it not? Nothing can ever make my life light and easy as it was before. But when it seems to go creeping on, and on, and on! Oh, Edgar! I hardly know what to do."

Edgar was silent, for he did not know what to say. He began to think he had been wrong in his conjecture that it might apply to himself.

"Is he, whom the secret most concerns, aware that you know it?" he asked presently, his mind quite full of his brother George.

"Yes," said Maria briefly.

"And relies on your silence," remarked Edgar.

"Yes," said Maria, again.

"Did you give him your promise to be silent?"

"We never exchanged a word on the subject," she cried, turning full upon him, as if to confront any heedless banter her statement might elicit.

"Are you quite sure you are under no mistake," asked Edgar, very gently.

"Quite sure," she replied, steadily.

"It is of no use my doubting this," said Edgar, "because you know the circumstances and I do not. And now you feel that it may not be right to keep this secret any longer?"

Maria did not directly answer this question. She sat holding the faded leaf between her thin fingers. "Edgar," she said, presently, "let me state a supposititious case. Suppose I knew that a certain person carried a certain drug about with him, which could produce certain effects. Suppose he knew that I was aware of this because I had seen the drug, though we had never talked it over. And suppose as time went by that the natural effects of that drug were seen among the people and things surrounding him, so that everybody could be quite sure that that drug was there, and that—that—it might do great harm to at least one person, if not to more, what ought I to do under such circumstances? Could it be wrong to speak? Could it be right to keep silence?"

"It could not be wrong to speak; it must be wrong to keep silence," said Edgar. He was watching his sister with solicitous

interest, and as he spoke, he thought he saw a shade of pain and shrinking pass over her pale face. "Remember," he said, "I am giving my convictions according to the circumstances as you state them."

"But you see," pleaded Maria, "because I happened to know that one person had had this drug, it would not follow that other persons might not have had it too. The present trouble it was causing might not be his."

There could be no doubt about it: his sister was pleading hard with her own conscience to allow her to keep silence concerning something she knew. What could it be? He felt sure that she had stated her case far wide of the mark, not to enlighten him unawares, and that drugs had really nothing to do with the matter: otherwise George's wan appearance and his uncle's sudden illness might have occurred to his mind, which they certainly did not. At least, not then.

"I can only repeat again that I am speaking and judging in the dark," he resumed. "If you wish me to say more, you must disclose the matter further to me. Are you not going to do so, Maria?"

"No, no," she hastily answered, "I never meant to do that now. Perhaps—later—if—if—if I am forced to. That's all," she concluded with less hesitation.

"Then, my dear, why did you enter upon the subject at all?"

"Because I am so unhappy," she said in a distressed tone. "You cannot picture the unhappiness, Edgar. But I am not going to speak. I must not; I would not."

"You must be suspecting somebody of some great guilt, or evil."

Maria buried her face in her hands. "One is so apt to fall into temptation," she lamented, looking up again. "Edgar, you yourself know how evil influences draw one and drag one down. And one begins doing wrong sometimes, not seeing it to be wrong!"

"I know all that," said her brother, quietly.

"You young men especially are apt to be led away by specious sophistry; and when once the straight road is deviated from, pitfalls lie around to entrap the unwary feet, and drag them, one knows not whither. But there, I will say no more," broke off Maria; "I might unwittingly say too much."

"What on earth has George been up to?" thought Edgar.

"Yes, let us quit the subject," he said aloud, feeling it a relief to do so. "But there's a thing, connected with another subject that I wish you would tell me, Maria: what it is that has arisen between you and Allan."

Quite a flood of pain passed over her countenance. She did not answer.

"I think you quarrelled one evening some months ago; you and he. You have not been the same since, either of you. At times you both look as if you had too much to bear."

"Ah—if you only knew what I have borne!" she moaned. "Oh,

that terrible evening! I cannot tell you about it now—I never shall, I think. Perhaps he may tell you himself some day. And I had to make believe that nothing was wrong, Edgar. And you know how dreadful aunt can be sometimes. And my uncle, too, happened to be very worried and angry at the time, and—and—yes I was tried."

"And so is he, I fancy. You have not met lately, have you?"

"Yes, we have; very lately. It was but a short interview, though, and I did not say to him all I wished to say—neither, I dare say, did he to me. I should like to meet him again, Edgar, but accidentally. As if by accident, you understand. Could you not contrive it?"

"I will take any message to him which you choose to send," promised Edgar. "I will bring him back with me—I will accept no excuse."

She shook her head decidedly. "No, no, that would not do. I cannot let him think that I sought the interview."

"And neither of you would care that I should make a third at it," laughed Edgar. "Well, I could stroll away to a safe distance. Let me see?"

He bent his head in thought. Maria sat looking at him, but did not speak.

"Maria," he said at last, "you know we have often talked of having an afternoon's fishing in the Black Pool. I mean he and I. Suppose I remind Allan of it, and get him to meet me there? You could go out for a walk, and come upon us unexpectedly."

"Yes," she said, eagerly. "Could you make it for to-morrow?—in the afternoon?"

Edgar took out his watch. "How the time has slipped on!" he exclaimed.

"But about to-morrow?" she cried, her eyes shining.

"Well, I will contrive to see Allan some time to-day, and get him to make the appointment for to-morrow afternoon," said Edgar. "He used to be fond of fishing. And when you come strolling up to us, young lady, I will hand my fishing-rod over to you, and leave you together for half an hour. What excuse can I make?"

"We shall not want one—either of us," she answered.

"Then I'll go down to the Works this afternoon—I dare say he'll be there."

So it was decided upon.

In the course of the afternoon Edgar Vivian went out in pursuance of this. He sought Allan first at the mill. The door-porter did not know whether his young master was there or not, and went into the counting house to inquire. He returned, saying, Mr. Allan was gone: he had been there all the morning but had left about an hour before.

So Edgar went on to Moorland House. As he approached it, a carriage and pair drove through the gate, and he thought he had again missed the object of his search. But as the equipage followed the curve of the road, he saw that its occupants were only two

ladies—Mrs. Grale and Mary Anne; and he was not sorry they were out of the house, for his visit was not to them, neither did he particularly care to see them.

He went up the avenue. The door of Moorland House did not stand open, after the hospitable fashion of most country houses. Mrs. Grale had been a town dweller in her young married life, and had then contracted sundry habits and prejudices which she had never since shaken off. To see her precautions against fire and thieves, one might have imagined that half the population of Dering belonged to the dangerous classes.

The door was not opened to Mr. Edgar Vivian very quickly, and the attendant was not the usual prim manservant, but a buxom little damsel, one Susan Brice, whom Edgar knew as one of his sister's former Sunday scholars, and who had been recently taken into the Grale service. She wore a dazed smile on her face as if she had been interrupted in some very pleasant occupation.

"Is Mr. Allan Grale at home?"

"No, sir," she replied, "he is just gone out. Only just, sir."

"I am unfortunate!" said Edgar, looking back down the avenue as if he might catch a glimpse of Allan's retreating figure. "Is he likely to be away long?"

"I don't know, sir, he didn't say," answered the girl.

"Do you happen to know in which direction he went?"

Susan reflected: her thoughts were evidently elsewhere. "No, she didn't know." The door in her hand almost imperceptibly went to a little, as if she had felt she had done her utmost for this visitor. But she liked to be very civil to dear Miss Vivian's brother, so she reflected again, and looking at the hall table, said that she had noticed a little parcel lying there, directed to Mr. Charles Carr, and as it was gone now, she thought Mr. Allan might have taken it to Dr. Palmer's himself.

"Well, I must try to overtake him," said Edgar. "But in case I don't, will you tell him—Stay," he thought, "better not to trust her; she might forget it."

"I will come in and write a note," he said, aloud.

The servant admitted him, and he turned to the hall table. "I can write it here," he said; "I want to be quick over it that I may go out and see if I can find him."

She went away and returned with pens, ink and paper. But Mr. Vivian had already written his note in pencil on a half sheet of paper which he tore from a pocket-book. It was very short.

"Dear Grale.—Will you join me to-morrow afternoon at the Black Pool for an hour or two's fishing? Let me know at once if you cannot come. I shall understand silence as consent. Fix earlier or later, should the afternoon not suit you.

"Yours ever, Edgar Vivian."

He twisted this into a three cornered missive and handed it to the girl.

"I want Mr. Allan to have this directly he comes home, remember," he said to her.

"Very well, sir; thank you," she answered. And then as she held the door for him to pass out, she ventured to ask ——

"Is Miss Maria quite well, sir?"

"Yes, Susan," Edgar answered, "she is quite well. But, of course, she has had much anxiety lately. Only we have great hopes of the General now."

"That is good news, sir," said the girl. She held the door open till Edgar was far up the avenue, despite her former impatience. His pleasant manner had won upon her.

"The Vivians do have a way with them that makes it a pleasure to serve them," she reflected as she turned back into the house. And in her honest desire to carry out Edgar's instructions, she did not leave his note on the card tray in the front hall. For Mr. Allan, in his comings and goings, did not always use the front door, but entered the Moorland demesne by a side gate for convenience' sake, and the house by a side door, which saved him walking round to the front. So Susan carried the note to his own room, and laid it on the toilet table in front of the glass. It was past three o'clock now, and dinner that evening was to be at six, as usual; he was not likely to come in long before that, and he would be sure to see it then.

Turning from the room, Susan's eye fell on a moveable calendar frame standing on the mantelshelf. It announced the day of the month as the twentieth. Susan paused a moment, nodding her head and repeating the figures, to fix them on her mind till she got downstairs. There she painfully inserted them in a blank space she had left in the date of a letter, in writing which Edgar's knock had interrupted her. The letter had been previously headed only by the day of the week, "Tuesday." Poor Susan wanted that letter to be as irreproachable as possible in every way. To her it was a very important document, being her first letter to her "young man," who was no other than the son of Mrs. Massey. The young man had long been employed at the Dering Railway Station, where, in the zealous discharge of his duties, he had met with a serious accident. After his recovery from it, he was appointed to a better post at a London terminus.

A girl is not likely to forget the date she puts to her first love letter. Susan had good reasons afterwards for never forgetting that she had dated hers the twentieth of October.

Edgar Vivian did not succeed in finding young Grale, and he turned his steps towards home. During his walk thither the aspect of everything changed. The sun retired from the sky, which was speedily overspread by threatening clouds. As he drew near the gates, a few big drops of rain fell, and he only reached the Court in time to escape a heavy shower. It passed, and the sun came out again.

CHAPTER XV.

AN EMPTY BEDROOM.

When Edgar Vivian had seen Mrs. and Miss Grale driving from home in their carriage, they were on their way to call on a certain Lady Laura Bond, a fashionable lady, who had recently come to live in the neighbourhood. Of course they purposed returning home before the dinner-hour, six o'clock. But when at Lady Laura's, circumstances, soon to be explained, had induced them to convert the intended brief call into a longer visit.

When they returned, they found Mr. Grale in a very bad temper over their unexpected absence. He did not let them know that he himself had been late for dinner by two or three hours, having not long taken it when they got home; but he was very cross with them.

The next morning the two ladies sat down to breakfast alone. Neither Mr. Grale nor Allan was present. The former had taken his breakfast, as was usual, at a much earlier hour; the son often took his at a later one, when everybody else had finished. Which caused Mrs. Grale on this morning to give utterance to the following plaintive remark.

"Really, Mary Anne, it seems as if we might as well have nobody that belong to us, for the little we see of those who do."

Sometimes Mary Anne would have sharply chid her mother for being fretful and exacting. But this morning she was in an especially good humour and inclined to take everything with the greatest equanimity.

"It was nobody's fault but our own that we did not dine at home yesterday, mamma, and it would be too much to expect Alny to wait indoors for us till we did put in an appearance. I dare say he had a visit to pay himself."

"Well, well, I suppose so," admitted Mrs. Grale. "But somehow when one does not find things just as they should be on coming home, it makes me feel as if I had no right to go out."

"But what was not as it should be?" argued Mary Anne, with unwonted good humour. "Four nights out of the seven Alny does not spend his evenings with us. It is papa's having been so fidgety and cross last night—I'm sure I can't tell why—that has made you grumble. And we never did such a thing before, as not come home to dinner when expected, while the others are always doing it!"

"That is a different thing, Mary Ann."

Mary Anne did not see that it was, and said so.

"I dare say they did not wait for us long. James," she continued, addressing the servant, who at that moment came in, "did papa and Mr. Allan wait dinner very long yesterday?"

"No, ma'am," he replied imperturbably, for he had overheard his master's complainings and could guess the drift of his young mistress's

question. "No, ma'am, master wasn't in long before you came home. Mr. Allan dined alone, ma'am."

"I hope he had everything he wanted," said Mrs. Grale solicitously. She carried with her the early impressions of humbler days, when the "eye of the mistress" was essential to the cooking of a chop or a potato. Her idea of woman's duty began and ended with the care of creature comforts.

"Yes, ma'am," said James. "Mr. Allan seemed a bit vexed when he found you did not come in to dinner; but he did not wait. He went out as soon as he had dined, quite immediate."

"I'm sure," said Mary Anne, as the man went away, "we don't have so much pleasure, that they need grudge us any little item of it that falls by chance in our way. For all papa's fuss about finding nobody at home and being left to feel neglected, he was not, you hear, in himself much before we were. The fact is, mother, you have spoilt him. I expect you began wrong at the beginning."

"Wait till you have a husband of you own, Mary Anne," said her mother. "It is a wife's duty to consult her husband's wants and pleasures."

Mary Anne laughed. "And is she to have none of her own?" she asked.

Mrs. Grale shook her head doubtfully. "It seems so sometimes," she said. "It does seem hard if I was not free to take the only opportunity of seeing a dear old friend of my youth; one who has been away in Australia for thirty years, and will soon be going back again."

Matters had happened in this fashion. When Mrs. Grale's call on Lady Laura Bond was drawing to a close, that lady happened to say she was expecting a visit that evening from a Miss Matthewson, whose acquaintance she had made during a tour in Australia, where this Miss Matthewson had spent the greater part of her life. The name and description had instantly arrested Mrs. Grale's attention, and by a few inquiries she ascertained that this Miss Matthewson was an old neighbour and playmate of her own when she was a girl, a young lady who had emigrated with her family many years before.

"Ah, the happy days when we were young!" Mrs. Grale had exclaimed, breaking through her awkward conventionality, in a burst of genuine feeling, and forgetting all the awe she felt for the lady of title. "Many a time have Bell Matthewson and I and my sister Marget spent a merry afternoon over our girdle cakes or our rowan jelly! Maybe, Lady Laura, you'll have heard Miss Matthewson mention Polly and Marget Burn?"

"Was Burn your maiden name?" Lady Laura asked; "I am sure I have heard her mention it." She was sure of nothing of the kind, but she was a tired woman of society, who rejoiced in a sensation of any kind, and Mrs. Grale's homely emotion had amused her fancy, and she had a mischievous wish to see the two old friends meet. Bell Matthewson had risen in the world more slowly and more naturally than Mrs. Grale

had; and Lady Laura had only known her as a thoroughly well-bred and self-possessed woman. How would she be likely to accept Mrs. Grale's gush of homely old memories? Lady Laura insisted that Mrs. Grale should remain to see her childhood's friend. With some demur on Mrs. Grale's part, she yielded, and her horses were put up. After all, her ladyship was disappointed of her fun, for Bell Matthewson proved quite equal to the occasion, and met her old playmate with all the warmth of the past, without bating one jot of the easy dignity of the present. In Mrs. Grale's arid life the evening had been a perfect oasis. Well might she now say so to Mary Anne!

"If your father could only guess what that glimpse of Bell Matthewson was to me, child, I don't think he'd have grudged me such a pleasure, even if it did put him about a little for once."

"Yes, we certainly did have a very happy evening," said Mary Anne, with that unwonted graciousness which her mother must have remarked, if she had not been absorbed in her own reveries. For Mary Anne was not thinking altogether of the hours spent in Lady Laura's perfumed little drawing-room, where she had been rather bored, but of the later part of their drive home to Moorland House. On one of the roads they had passed George Vivian: it was a light night, and when Mary Anne recognised him they had stopped the carriage and taken him up. George had been to London for a few days, he told them; and, for some reason of his own, which he did not tell, he had not journeyed home by the line which led straight through Dering, but by another, the main line, whose nearest station —Carston—was more than five miles away across country. When they took him up, he was looking very distrait and fagged with his walk; but under the influence of the restful motion, Mrs. Grale's solicitude and Mary Anne's beaming graciousness, he had soon rallied. When the ladies had descended at Moorland House, they had ordered their coachman to drive on to the Court with Mr. Vivian. That was the history of the previous evening.

"How very nice George Vivian is," exclaimed Mary Anne, interrupting her mother's reveries of the days gone by. "He is by far the nicest of all the family. I don't like Edgar at all; and George never shows himself at his best when Edgar is about."

The truth was, Edgar did not like Mary Anne. He had a very thorough appreciation of the flimsiness of her character and her pretensions. Perhaps George took no higher view of the young lady—he would laugh over her with Edgar sarcastically enough; but it was in his nature to be agreeable to present company at any cost.

"Don't you like Edgar?" asked Mrs. Grale, surprised. "Why, I like Edgar best; not but that they are both fine young men. I used to like the sister too, and to think what a good thing it would be for Allan if—but there! men never seem to see what is best for them. He went about her a great deal more than he should, if he didn't mean anything—I've said so to him more than once. And

I've wondered once or twice lately, seeing her pale face, whether she is taking it to heart. But they say she has had good offers."

"Then I wonder she does not accept them. But, mamma, I think I can tell you a secret—that Alny likes her more than you expect. I'm sure she has not a very happy time with her aunt."

"And the estate won't spare much money for her when her uncle is taken," remarked Mrs. Grale, in that tone of easy solicitude which people use concerning the crooks in others' lots. "Miss Vivian of Dering Court will find a great change then, unless she can go on living at it with her brother George."

"It is not likely George's wife would choose that," said Mary Anne, with an air of conviction.

"Perhaps he won't marry," suggested Mrs. Grale.

Mary Anne simpered consciously. "Perhaps not," she said: "but there is no doubt he would be very glad to do so."

"If he wants to, he may," commented plain-spoken Mrs. Grale. "He has quite enough fortune and family behind him to make such an attractive young man acceptable in most quarters: he is the heir. I'm sure I'd not wish you a better husband than George Vivian," she added pathetically.

Mary Anne tossed her head. "No wonder men are conceited," she remarked, "if many women speak of them as you do, mamma. But they find out their mistake sometimes."

"Well, well," Mrs. Grale answered in her inconsequent, plaintive style. "I've never seen any good come of women refusing to submit to their natural lot. Men will be masters, and if they don't get their will one way, they'll have it in another; and there is nothing for us but to do one's best to keep things smooth. I do wish Allan would come down," she broke off suddenly. "He is later than usual."

"Perhaps he came in late last night," observed Mary Anne.

"I don't know what time it was; I did not hear him. I can hear nothing in my bedroom at the end of that long thickly carpeted corridor," bewailed Mrs. Grale. "I'm sure I lay awake long enough myself; I don't remember when I have had so bad a night."

"It must have been through papa's grumbling—coming after your excitement at seeing your old friend."

"I suppose so," admitted Mrs. Grale. "I thought I never was to fall asleep, and when I did, it brought no better rest. It was all over again, a mixture of little bits of past and present, the lanes about here, and the old windmill there, and the fields I'd been talking of with Bell Matthewson. And once I woke up with a start and a cry, so that I disturbed your father. I had been dreaming of the Black Pool here, and that somebody was drowning in it. Not drowning accidentally, but—but ——" Mrs. Grale stopped.

Mary Anne gazed at her mother. "Do you mean—put in?" she cried.

"There was a great horror upon me, child, yet nothing was clear. Somehow I've always had a shrinking feeling of that Black Pool. It was not only that I seemed to be looking down at it, but I felt the horrid chill of the water. And my sister Marget was in all the dream, and seemed continually to be following me about, wanting something. Sometimes she was a girl as she used to be, and sometimes she was a worn-out old woman as Allan says she is now. It's likely she has thought a good deal about me, since Alny was at Savoch. Perhaps that is what made me dream of her."

"You were talking a great deal about her with Miss Matthewson last night—it must have been through that," observed Mary Anne.

"I don't know," persisted Mrs. Grale. "I've often noticed things work together, in a wonderful way, without anybody's willing or planning, and when they do that, I fancy they must mean something. There's your brother finding himself at Savoch without any intention of his own. I'm sure your Uncle Gibson's is the last sort of house Alny would care to visit."

"But he went there of his own accord," said Mary Anne. "He might have gone to the nearest hotel instead."

She spoke with something of the asperity she generally reserved for home consumption, for she had not been pleased with Allan for taking George Vivian among those homely relatives at Savoch.

"That would have been most unnatural," said Mrs. Grale, impressively, "when a very Providence seemed to have led him to their door."

"Well, what are the other things which have worked together now?" asked Mary Anne.

"There was our meeting with Bell Matthewson," said Mrs. Grale. "You know yourself how unexpected that was, and how Lady Laura had to overrule me to get me to wait to see her."

"That makes only two things," said Mary Anne, perhaps really wishing to disperse her mother's ill impressions; "and we could have come away if we had liked."

"Ah," said Mrs. Grale, "we may run from fate, Mary Anne, but we shall always find it in front, coming to meet us."

"You owe those ideas to your Scotch bringing-up, mother," observed the girl.

"Never mind what I owe them to, if they are true," returned Mrs. Grale. "And then there is this," she went on, lowering her voice as if she thought she would now at last impress her daughter: "Twice before in my life has Bell Matthewson turned up unexpectedly, and each time something ill has happened."

Mary Anne laughed lightly; her nature was entirely destitute of superstition. "She has been out of sight for a long time now, mother. Has nothing happened all that while?"

Mrs. Grale took no notice of this, but went on with her story. 'Once, when Bell was only a child, she was sent away from home for

a year. Owing to some unexpected change, she came back quite suddenly. I remember how pleased Marget and I were. That very night our barn was burned down, and the house was saved by little short of a miracle! I remember seeing Bell's face in the crowd under the flames; she was in her father's arms, wrapped in a rug."

"Do you think she could have raised the fire?" asked Mary Anne, with laughing mockery.

"She was an innocent child, sleeping in a cot by her mother's side," returned Mrs. Grale, too absorbed to be indignant. "The next time, Bell was nearly grown up, and was away at school, when the pupils were all sent home because a fever had broken out. On the very night of her return, the ship in which my father was returning from Shetland, where he had been doing business in ponies, was wrecked off Buckie, and all lives were lost. Bell was standing in our kitchen when the news came in. You might have heard her allude to that last evening. I don't forget these things, Mary Anne."

"I was talking with Lady Laura. But if you consider Miss Matthewson so unlucky a person, mamma, I should certainly have avoided her. Not that I believe in such nonsense a bit."

"I never thought of it till afterwards," admitted Mrs. Grale. "It only came into my head after we came home, and everything seemed so unhappy. James!" she interjected, as the servant again appeared, "are you sure you have knocked at Mr. Allan's door?"

"Yes, ma'am, I knocked as usual."

"You had better go up and knock again," said Miss Grale.

"Not that any ill-luck can be in Bell Matthewson herself," Mrs. Grale resumed, as the man retired. "A gentler, kinder girl never lived, and I can see she's the same now she's a woman. I've heard my poor mother say it was a blessing she was sent to be among us at my dear father's death. There was none more helpful."

"Well, she wont be available in any misfortune her ill-fated presence may bring upon us this time," returned Mary Anne. "Her ship sails to-morrow for Australia, and she said she was to be on board to-night. I suppose she is in Southampton by now. And, mamma, how long is this black spell supposed to last?" continued the girl, in a light, bantering tone.

Mrs. Grale only shook her head and sighed in answer. They had both risen from the breakfast table. She was in a small worry over the tardy appearance of her son.

"After being so put out last evening, if your papa should happen to look in this morning, and find Alny not down yet, we should have a pretty scene," she remarked. "I wish you would go and knock at his door yourself, Mary Anne; and do not come away until you get an answer."

"I will," replied the young lady, with alacrity. "I am going to take these flowers to the billiard-room, and I will give him a fine rapping as I go and as I come back."

Mrs. Grale sighed, took up a newspaper and sat down at the window.

It was a Scotch newspaper, which had been directed to her in her sister Margaret's handwriting. Such were almost the only tokens of remembrance which ever passed between the sisters, and even those had grown very far between, until Allan's visit to Savoch had somewhat freshened the old tie.

Mrs. Grale read through two "trials," and then Mary Anne came in again, looking very cross.

"Well?" questioned Mrs. Grale.

"I have knocked twice at his door—going and returning," she said irritably. "The first time he gave some low, inarticulate groan; the second time he condescended to give no answer at all."

"Dear me, perhaps he is ill," exclaimed the mother, instantly taking the alarm.

"James," she said, summoning the servant, "Did Mr. Allan speak to you when you knocked?"

"I can hardly say, ma'am," he replied. "Mr. Allan very seldom does, so I rather think he did not to-day."

"I dare say he stayed out very late and is sleeping heavily," said Mary Anne.

"But he is not in the habit of staying out very late. I think I shall go and see."

Mrs. Grale felt uneasy. But the feeling was quite vague. Had she been stopped on her way upstairs, and asked if she seriously thought anything was wrong, she would have answered "No."

She rapped sharply on the door. Allan would know her touch, and he had never failed to answer *her*.

It was only when her knock was received in dead silence, that she felt her heart suddenly faint within her, and her fear grew so strong that she almost seemed to hear a voice say,

"It has come!"

Had there been any watchers, they would have seen her comely face blanch suddenly. She did not delay a moment. She made a desperate rush at the door, as one does who expects to find it fastened.

But it was not fastened. In a second she was inside the room. What had she thought to see?

What she did see was an orderly apartment, which had evidently never been slept in or disturbed at all during the previous night.

It was not the first time this had happened. Once, long before, Allan Grale, going to a bachelor dinner party, had done as many of the other young fellows did at it, and was not in a fit state to return home.

His mother recalled this with a heightened colour. But to forget himself in that way was not a common fault with Allan: and he had not been dining out last night.

A note was lying on the toilet-table. She stood still, her breath coming fast. Nobody can fathom the wave of misery which broke over her at that moment, and was hardly to be accounted for. Details of old tragic gossip, scraps of half-forgotten newspaper paragraphs whirled through her brain, while Alny's baby fingers seemed to stroke her face and his boyish laughter to ring in her ears. Were these her son's last words—then they must be for her first! With one desperate resolution, she took up the paper.

This was the note that Edgar Vivian had left on the preceding afternoon, and which Susan had placed on the table. It was addressed to Allan himself.

Mrs. Grale shrank from opening it; she wondered who it was from and what it contained. If Mr. Grale heard of Alny's staying out, there would be an outbreak of scolding and recrimination, and nobody knew how it would end. Her fear always was lest such outbreaks should result in Allan's refusing to live at home. If only this lapse could be "got over" quietly, she herself would "talk seriously" to Alny, and it might never happen again. Mrs. Grale's aspirations were all for a quiet life.

Well, well; if the matter was to be smoothed over and brought right without a fuss, there must be no outcry now. She thought she heard the rattle of the housemaid's box on the stairs, and her mind seemed to make itself up on the instant. It is wonderful of how much self-control the weakest women may be capable, when they need it to screen a scandal on one they love. She took the key from her son's door, stepped outside, locked it, put it in her pocket, and went downstairs. It is hard to believe, but she scarcely felt so agitated as when she had ascended them. Then she had given herself up as a prey to vague, superstitious forebodings; now, she deemed that she knew what had raised them, and that she knew its limits.

"Mary Anne," she said, as she entered the dining-room, glancing round to see that James was not there, "Allan is not in his room; he has not been at home all night."

Mary Anne, attending to the flowers, set down a vase with a jerk. "I thought there must be something wrong," said she. "He must have forgotten his good manners, I suppose, as he did once before."

"Didn't you say he answered your first knock?" asked Mrs. Grale.

"I thought I heard a sound," replied Mary Anne, "scarcely an audible one. It sounded like a groan. Of course I inferred it came from him."

"When this thing occurred before, he did not come home till late the next evening," observed Mrs. Grale, looking anxiously into her daughter's face.

Mary Anne laughed slightly, "I remember," she returned. "He seemed to think we might not notice he had missed a day!"

"O, Mary Anne," wailed the unhappy mother, "do you think we might possibly get this over without your papa knowing it?"

Mary Anne paused, revolving sundry thoughts of her own. "Of course we could," she said. "Only you are always so nervous, mamma, you would probably let something slip out."

"No, I wouldn't," said Mrs. Grale eagerly. "I'd keep perfectly quiet, my dear. Just trust me. At least until night. If he doesn't come home before then, I could never lie awake listening and not let your papa know."

"He is sure to be home before then," answered Mary Anne. "He will remember that we do not know where he went to, and that you will be uneasy. With all his faults, mother, he is fond of you."

"Ah, that he is. Only—suppose anything should be wrong?" suddenly added Mrs. Grale.

"What can be wrong?" returned Mary Anne. "There cannot have been any accident; in a place like this we should hear of it instantly. No news is good news everywhere, except in great cities. But I tell you, mamma, you are nervous to-day; but for that, you would not be uneasy."

"Perhaps I am," the mother meekly said. And already her cap was beginning to stand on one side.

"You'd better go up stairs and lie down and rest as much as you can," observed Mary Anne. "If visitors come in—or papa—I will say you have a headache. You may drop asleep, and that will make the day pass more quickly.

Mrs. Grale took her daughter's advice. But the day passed tediously enough for both of them. Mr. Grale did not come home for lunch. Also, he was so very late for dinner that he could not wonder the rest of the family had taken that meal without him. His late absence from Dering caused him to be very busy at the works. Mary Anne met him with the intimation that "mamma was poorly and had been lying down the greater part of the day." She did not add another word, though her tone and manner conveyed a good deal of reproach, over which the old gentleman gave an inarticulate grumble, but made no enquiry about Allan.

Mary Anne had not received a visit from George Vivian which she had somewhat expected; but a messenger came from the Court conveying Mr. George Vivian's compliments and enquiries after the ladies, which pleased her almost as well. He brought a book which George had chanced to mention during their drive the previous night, and a bouquet of beautiful white flowers from the Court greenhouse. There seemed to Mary Anne an especial significance in those flowers being white!

After dinner, Mr. Grale did not go back to the mills as he sometimes did, but retired to a little room which he kept for business purposes in his own house, and where he presently received one or two callers. As James, the discriminating manservant described

these callers as "persons," Mary Anne judged them to be some of the commercial travellers who were occasionally admitted to interviews with her father.

The young lady did not yet feel any anxiety about her brother, but she did feel curious to know how this escapade of his was to end this time. When the last post came in, she looked over the letters with even more than her usual interest. None for herself. None for Allan. Four ordinary looking business missives for papa. One for mamma, in an unfamiliar hand. Its post-mark was Southampton. She turned it over. It was sealed with the monogram B. M.

"A valediction from that Miss Bella Matthewson," decided Mary Anne. "It will do it no harm to wait till morning. I dare say mamma is really asleep for the night by this time. And if not, she is so fanciful, that it will only make her nervous, seeing that Alny has not come home yet. Of course, he is waiting for that until the house is quiet.

But whether that was so or not, the house was not destined to be quiet in Mary Anne's meaning of the word. Her father did not dismiss his callers till after she had gone to bed. Then as he went heavily and slowly upstairs, he met his wife, wrapped in a dressing-gown and carrying a candle, stealing from the corridor into which her son's bedroom opened. She had gone to see whether he had returned, having taken the precaution to unlock his door an hour or two earlier to facilitate his unnoticed entrance. She found everything as she had left it. So when she saw her husband, her already over-strained nerve gave way, and with a burst of tears, half piteous, half passionate, she told him the truth.

He took it—O so quietly! On that other similar occasion, long ago, he had stormed and scolded loudly. This time he did not say a word. He took his wife's arm and led her back to their bed-chamber. And while he led her, it seemed as if he leaned on her. Once there, he drew up a chair in front of the fireplace, which still held no fire but its summer ornaments—and sitting down, buried his face in his hands.

To see him take it like this, frightened her more than all.

"Oh Dick, Dick," she wailed, "what has befallen him? Where is he, and what is he doing?"

She had scarcely called her husband Dick since their courting days.

(*To be continued.*)

THE SUNNY SIDE OF THE WALL.

I HAVE hitherto shrunk from writing on the subject of this paper because it has appeared to me that there is an unseemliness in anyone who suffers from a personal imperfection, thus calling on an audience to listen to his or her lamentations. It did not occur to me until I read the brave words of Miss Alice King on Blindness in a previous number of this magazine* that such a subject could be dealt with, not only without lamenting, but from an opposite view: one not only full of interest, but, at the same time, helpful to others.

The comfort I have myself gathered from that paper on account of one very dear to me, induces me to hope that what I have to say may also find an interested audience, and in turn help and cheer companions in misfortune, and those who have to do with them.

Few as have been the writers who have spoken out of their own personal experience of blindness, still fewer, if any, save Dr. Kitto, in his book entitled "The Lost Senses," have written their experience of this lesser misfortune of deafness. It is not, therefore, improbable that most people have a somewhat vague idea of the real condition of their deaf brothers and sisters, and while they magnify in some degree the deprivation of hearing, understand still less the many little difficulties arising from it.

A person who becomes deaf is of course thrown out of rapport with his or her surroundings with regard to sound, but they are not so entirely cut off from their external relation to it as would appear. It must be understood that I am speaking of those who, like myself, are totally deaf, but were not born so, and thus have a memory of sounds to assist them in re-adjusting the faculties left to them so as to correspond with their changed surroundings. Here, as in the case of blindness, compensation is made, and the remaining senses gain incalculably in fineness and intensity. By a combination of keen observance and the relation kept up by means of *vibration* with external sounds, what may almost be called another sense is developed. So wonderful and complete is the organisation with which a beneficent Creator has endowed us that even we whom He has seen fit, for some wise and merciful reason, to make imperfect, thus can yet show forth His praise in His works.

A deaf person does not by any means live in a world of such utter and complete silence as must appear to those about them who do not recognise the value of vibration in conveying the impression of external sound to internal senses. Every footstep in a room, every touch on an article of furniture, even the slight disturbance of the air caused

* *Argosy*, September, 1884.

by the opening or shutting of a door, is as instantly and unconsciously noted by a deaf as it would be by a hearing person.

A friend was once greatly astonished to find that I was aware of someone having passed outside a door at a distant corner of the room, which was only an inch or so open, the footfall having been so light that she herself had scarcely noticed the fact; but the slight vibration caused by the step, and the momentary darkening of the narrow streak of light coming through the opening of the door had betrayed it to me. I could also, if I were taking special notice, from some characteristic of the step or movement of the shadow, hazard a guess as to the identity of the individual who had so passed. Outside noises also make themselves felt in this manner. I have often amused myself in the silence of night by counting the number of carriages in the trains running near our house, the roll of every separate pair of wheels being perfectly distinct to me.

Neither are nature's many voices silent to the deaf; especially to those who love and look for them. Even Fairy Fine-ear herself could not take more delight in the varied music of the country than I do. The rustle of leaves in the wind—one has but to look at a tree to hear them; the hum of bees, the songs of birds—the air is teeming with such sounds. And then the water music: the steady ripple of the river, the dance of the brook, and the grander tones of the sea, from the murmur and plash of its tiny waves, to the boom and roar of stormy breakers. The mental ear of a lover of these things can hear them all, whenever the bodily eye sees them.

A Scottish lassie, with whom I had been spending some hours by a waterfall near Braemar, once said to me, "How strange that the sound of the water seems to 'deave' you just as it does me, though you cannot hear it." And this was literally true. So exactly the same is the impression produced on the other senses by water in motion, that it is hard even for me myself to realise that I only see it and do not hear it also.

It is true that many of us are cut off from the free and rapid interchange of thought, which makes the great charm of social life, and that the voices of those we love must for ever remain silent in this world to us. But the quick eye and keen observation which becomes habitual to the deaf enable us to read the countenances and manners of those about us with marvellous facility. And yet this capacity, while being the greatest blessing to us, frequently leads to difficulties which, sometimes amusing, are often, on the other hand, excessively awkward.

I have read, and been told, that the deaf are always suspicious. Now I must be pardoned if I venture here to question the truth of this assertion. A little consideration will show those who make it that we are not naturally or necessarily more suspicious than hearing people, and that in most cases where this fault is visible it will be found that the involuntary discourtesy of others is to blame for it.

People would not dream of making remarks about each other among their hearing friends; neither does courtesy permit a whispered conversation on any subject not intended to be heard by a third party to be carried on in their presence. Surely then it is not difficult to refrain from doing this when in company with a deaf person who has, as I have said, much quicker and better trained powers of observation than themselves.

Expression and gesture tell us much, and by some instinct of the same kind as that acknowledged to be possessed by the blind, we are always to some extent cognisant of what is discussed in our presence. We know when we are the subject of, or purposely shut out from a conversation; especially when on asking a question with regard to it, we are put off, with some palpable evasion. Those who are conscious of any form of personal infirmity are naturally sensitive, and do not like to feel that it is being, as it seems to them, taken advantage of. "Evil is wrought by want of thought, as well as want of heart," and it is impossible that such a course of action should not implant an uncomfortable feeling in the mind of a deaf companion. Therefore, I am happy to think that a time is coming when no one will venture to do this, as the wonderful method of lip-reading becomes more widely known and practised, by means o which deaf persons who have learnt it can read from the lips of those around them as easily and quickly as if they could hear them speak. I do not know whether fellow-sufferers from deafness fit, in their mind's ear, articulate voices to each one of their friends as I have always done. I can only say that to me, when I read words or sentences thus on the lips of a speaker, it seems as if I really heard them speak with their natural voices; and a lady, who is more proficient than I am as yet, tells me she feels quite like a hearing person when in the company of deaf companions who have not learnt the art of lip-reading.

Did any of my readers chance to see Miss Hull—of the Training College for teachers of the deaf, now established at Ealing—at work with her pupils, in the Educational department of the late Health Exhibition, where she took them daily for so many busy weeks? If so, they saw for themselves the truly marvellous perfection to which the German, or pure oral system of teaching the deaf and dumb has now been brought.

At the international congress held at Milan in 1880 it was almost unanimously agreed, even by those most interested in the matter, but who had not previously placed entire faith in the method, that it is the only real and natural one by which the so called deaf-mute can be restored to free communication with the external world, and by which children thus afflicted can be as well educated and fitted to take their places in it, as are their hearing fellows.

It has long been an accepted truth that deaf-born children are not necessarily also dumb. Their education in speech and lip reading is therefore carried on simultaneously until they have so far advanced in

both, that all knowledge can be communicated to them *viva voce* just as it would be to hearing children.

In the greater number of the many schools for the education of the deaf throughout Europe (Great Britain being, alas! a notable exception) this system has entirely superseded that of signs. And speaking to the parents or friends of a child who becomes deaf, I would say most earnestly: Let them begin at once to learn lip-reading, and from the first discourage in them, and forbid in all who have to do with them, the use of signs, and of the finger alphabet which will seriously retard their progress in learning to converse orally. Thus, if it be God's will to build up a life-long wall of silence between them and the external world they may at least live on the sunny side of the wall, where their quick eyes may be trained to do duty for their dead ears.

Miss Hull is one of those who have given their whole life and energy to this great work of teaching the dumb to speak and the deaf, if not to hear, to *see*. After years devoted to patient study in order to discover the best means of carrying out her object, she now says she "rests with perfect satisfaction in the working of this system, which can completely restore all the powers of knowledge through spoken language to the deaf, *literally* as to the hearing."

All honour to such noble workers, and their work! It is in the hope of taking some small share in helping to make it known that I write this paper. There are yet many, even amongst those who honestly desire to benefit their fellow creatures, who are prejudiced against this system, and oppose it, because they have not proved it for themselves. By this means they put a stumbling block in the way of the deaf, now that the efforts of these thoughtful and large-hearted men and women have discovered how their powers of speech can be drawn out, and awaken in them the "soul music," which otherwise must for ever have remained mute.

I will ask to be allowed to quote here two cases which have lately been told me by a member of the committee of the Ealing Training College. They will help to prove that the deaf *have* been by these means so educated as to enable them to play their parts in the ranks of the work-a-day world.

A young man, engaged to be married, and who had been rendered totally deaf from a heavy fall from his horse, took lessons in lip-reading from Mr. Kinsey, the principal of the Training College, and became so proficient that he is now continuing his business as before the accident. His sister, who was absent in India at the time, and had not therefore seen her brother since his affliction, remarked on her return that she found so little difference in him that she could scarcely realise his deafness, and was only reminded of it now and then, when during a conversation with him she turned aside, forgetting he must *see* to understand.

A deaf gentleman in America having perfectly acquired the art of

lip-reading determined to enter the army, but being aware that if the fact of his deafness became known this would not be permitted, he went to a distant part of the country where he was a stranger, presented himself for examination and passed successfully without his defect having been discovered. One night, having remained with friends till after dark, he was, on his return to quarters, challenged by the sentinel, whom in consequence of the darkness he could not see. The challenge was repeated three times in vain, remaining of course unanswered. At last his attention was attracted to it by receiving a bayonet wound in the arm. When asked why he had not replied to the challenge he refused to answer, and had not a brother officer guessed the reason, and, by speaking to him when behind his back, demonstrated that he could not hear, he would have been severely punished. He was dismissed the army, but succeeded in re-entering it for a short time, when again an accident discovered his deafness, and resulted in a second dismissal.

I could record many other cases, but these will serve to show what an unspeakable benefit this oral system is capable of being to mankind, and how, when it becomes more universally known, many an unfortunate one may hope that, despite their imperfections, few fields of useful labour will be closed to them. Many are open to them now, and especially in those of literature, art and science they are just as capable of rising to eminence as if they were in full possession of all their faculties.

A dear little child once quaintly observed to me: "You are not quite perfect now because you can't hear, but you were born perfect." And then added with a consolatory little nod: "And you will be perfect again some day."

Yes, this best of hopes is added to us also. For when He, who is Himself the type of all perfection, says "Come," we may be very sure that our spiritual ears will be open to hear His voice in that glorious "some day" when we "wake up after His likeness and shall be satisfied with it."

HELEN MARION BURNSIDE.

ONLY A YEAR OR TWO AGO.

A DENSE, dark, wet fog hung over the City of London. It was a bitterly-cold morning in a bitter winter. Omnibuses were surmounted by a sea of umbrellas; not a place inside was to be had. Cabs drove down the streets, conveying well-to-do merchants to their place of business; foot passengers, for it is not everybody who has the money to ride, hurried along the pavements, looking depressed and dismal. This mass of people, city men, were all on their way to begin their daily work.

Anything more discomforting than the pilgrimage through the streets on a dark and wretched winter's morning, when day has hardly begun, cannot well be pictured by those who are not familiar with it; and those who are can only get reconciled to its agreeable enjoyment by dint of use, and of good health and strength.

One slight, slim young fellow, looking as if a sharp gust of wind might blow him away, shivering as if the cold wet fog were penetrating right into him through his worn great coat, bore onwards steadily. He was a nice-looking young man, twenty years old, or so, with a sensitive face, which had "gentleman" plainly written on it, sad dark eyes, and soft brown hair. Turning down one of the streets leading out of Cheapside, he soon passed into a large building, the extensive business premises of a rich and flourishing firm of warehousemen, Messrs. Coingold and Co.

The work of this young fellow lay at present in a room that had to be lighted artificially. Whether the sun might shine outside, or the rain might rain, or the fog choke all light from the atmosphere, this spacious lower room must have gas burning in it by night and by day. Consequently it had acquired a sort of stuffy, not to say unwholesome air: harmless enough, no doubt, to sound lungs, but not so much so to weak ones. The young man had put off his overcoat, and was sitting down to a desk, when a voice of authority lifted itself.

"You are late again, Mr. Lavender."

"Yes, sir, a little. It is so very bad a morning, that I waited, hoping to get a place in an omnibus; but it turned out to be of no use, and rather hindered me. I shall soon catch it up, Mr. Brown," he added cheerfully.

"Omnibuses all full to-day, I expect," returned Mr. Brown. "It's detestable weather."

"And we have had a good spell of it now," remarked young Lavender, settling to his work.

Mr. Brown, head man in that dark department, was not hard-hearted, and refrained from reminding Charles Lavender that he had latterly been more often late than early, though he used to be the

essence of punctuality. Mr. Brown had sons of his own, and this makes a man lenient to the sons of others. He knew that young Lavender walked in of a day to save his pocket, and he fancied that he might be longer doing it than formerly; for he looked shadowy and worn, as though he wanted strength, and was troubled also with a short hacking cough. The cough was persistent to-day.

"Have you taken cold, Mr. Lavender?" Mr. Brown asked him, when the first pressure of the morning's business had been got through.

"I suppose I have, sir, a little. It is this nasty weather."

"Do you think you are as strong as you used to be?"

Charles Lavender's delicate face flushed. It was a sensitive point with him. He had not thought lately that he was strong; had felt indeed that a little more of this exposure to the fogs and the wet and the piercing wind, might lay him upon a sick bed. And that would not do at all.

"Oh, I think I am all right, Mr. Brown, thank you."

The day wore on. By its close, young Lavender had grown feverish, ill, fit for nothing; and it was only by dint of forced exertion he could give the needful attention to his duties. His cough had wearied him; his side pained him. Mr. Brown, who did not go about with his eyes shut, remarked to Mr. Watton (another head man), while they were at tea, that he thought young Lavender was going to break-up.

Charles felt so weak when he left at six o'clock, and went splashing through the streets, on which the half-frozen rain was pouring, and the damp mist of fog was obscuring the lamps, that he halted at a corner to wait for an omnibus, hoping there would be a vacant place within it. It came up, and there was none. Another omnibus would soon pass, and Charles waited on. The wind blew on him; the wet chilled him to his very marrow. Stronger and healthier young fellows went on, treading bravely: it did not hurt them.

"Is it you, Lavender? Rather a draughty corner to stand at." The speaker was Mr. Watton. He also was going home.

"I am waiting for an omnibus," explained Charles Lavender. "The last that came up was full inside."

"And the next will be full also, rely upon that; they'll all be full, such a night as this," replied Mr. Watton, glancing at the shadowy form and the thin face, on which, if he could read signs, our national malady, consumption, was setting its seal. He wondered he had not noticed the signs before: he saw young Lavender every day: but Mr. Brown's remark had served to awaken his attention.

"I was going to take a cab," said he; "I don't relish an outside place on an omnibus to-night myself: you are welcome to a seat in it with me, Lavender."

Mr. Watton hailed a four-wheeled cab that was passing, and got into it with young Lavender and his thanks. Mr. Watton was the first to get out; but he sent the other on in it, and paid the fare.

Charles lived with his mother in an open neighbourhood, about two miles from St. Paul's. They had part of a small house, not being able to afford a whole one. The father, Charles Lavender the elder, had been a professional man; he had died too early to have put by money, and left no means for his widow and little son. A distant relative of Mrs. Lavender's, one Miss Roberts, who could well afford it, came forward to allow her a hundred pounds yearly Upon that Mrs. Lavender had lived, and brought up Charles. At a suitable age she had obtained for him an entrance into the house of Coingold and Company, and thought herself very lucky, for it was a firm of high standing and consideration in the City. Charles would have preferred a profession; he did not want to be placed at business; he wanted to study for the law; but, for that, the necessary money was lacking.

"When we cannot do as we would in this world, my boy, we must do as we can," his ever cheerful mother, who always made the best of everything, said to him. "Coingolds' is one of the first houses of its kind, you know; gentlemen's sons have, like you, gone into it; many have made a large fortune in it; and who knows, Charley, but you will ride in your carriage some day."

Charles Lavender bent his mind to circumstances; he did his best at Coingolds', and strove to please, and found favour. But he did not like the life, and it did not like him. He was one of those delicate young fellows, both in mind and body, upon whom the rough bustle of a city career, the confinement, the daily toil, and the out-of-door exposure morning and evening tell badly. Whatever the weather, he must face it. The firm was quite satisfied with him: he had got on, and was now paid a hundred a year: and he had been informed that the following Christmas he would be moved up to a different department and his salary considerably increased. So that was good news, for the hundred a year comprised all that he and his mother now had to live upon. With Miss Roberts's death the other hundred had ceased. Charles took his daily dinner at Coingolds', always a liberal one, and his tea.

"Why Charley, did you come home in a cab? I heard one stop!"

"Quite grandly in a cab, mother," laughed Charley, meeting the dear, ever bright little woman, who came forward with a loving kiss. And he explained how it was.

"It was very kind of Mr. Watton, was it not, mother? Everybody is kind to me, I think."

The fire was bright, the tea-dinner (or supper) was ready. Inwardly anxious, but outwardly smiling, Mrs. Lavender glanced at him as he sat down to it, and listened to his hacking cough. She did not like this cough, or his worn look: they were beginning to put her in mind of his father. Charles had changed his coat and waistcoat for those worn at home: nobody knows but they who have tried it how clothes have to be looked at out of a hundred pounds a year.

"Here's a beautiful sole for you to-night, Charley," said Mrs. Lavender: "I thought you would like it."

"Thank you, mother," he said, as he took the plate she handed to him. "But you have kept none for yourself!—just the bare head and the tail."

She laughed merrily. "Because I am not hungry, dear. You should have seen the dinner I ate." As if his nourishment were not of more consequence than her own!

"I wish this cold weather would leave us!" he presently said, looking up from his fish. "You can't think what it was at all the corners of the streets to-day; the wind cutting you in two, and the cold damp fog chilling you! I thought of Shakespeare's words, mother, 'Freeze freeze, thou bitter sky!' If we could only have summer weather always!"

"Well, my dear, the nice warm spring will be shortly coming on."

But the spring did not seem inclined to give any intimation of coming on, and the bitter sky and the wintry wind maintained their hold on our Island world. It was springtime by the calendar, but not by the weather. Charles Lavender went to the city through it all, as usual; but his frame grew more shadowy as the weeks wore by, his face wan, and his cough deeper.

"It is sleet, I'm afraid, that's falling now," said his mother one morning, opening the door for him when he was starting, and looking dubiously at the outer world. "Perhaps there'll be an inside place in the omnibus, Charles?"

"Not much chance of it," he answered, putting up his umbrella; "but I'll get into it if there is, when one overtakes me. Go in, mother; don't stand in the wet and cold. Good bye."

The sleet did not come straight down, as well-behaved sleet would; it dashed upon people slantwise, and it was sharp and fierce, and an umbrella had no chance against it. Charles bore onwards through the dreary streets on his long walk, for of course the omnibuses had all taken care to fill themselves; and in time he arrived at his journey's end, chilled and weary, and more fit to be in bed than at work. But the work had to be done in the dark close room; dark but for the gas; and Charles kept on at it, his head aching, his fevered hands trembling, his breath shortening and his cough tormenting him. Mr. Brown, regarding things around him with a critical eye, took notice of Charles Lavender and of the signs and symptoms that attended him.

"He grows worse; won't be able to keep it up long for certain," thought Mr. Brown. "Something ought to be done for him."

After the midday dinner was over in the large dining-room, Mr. Brown went to the door of the private room of the partners, and knocked at it. "Come in," called out young Mr. Coingold, the only one of them there at the moment. He was in an easy chair

before the fire, his shapely boots stretched out on the fender, and his left hand, on which shone a diamond ring, lifted to stroke his fair moustache.

"Oh it is you, Mr. Brown,"—sitting back a little and letting his hand drop. "Do you want anything?"

Mr. Brown shut the door, and answered that he had come to speak about young Lavender; thought perhaps it lay in his duty to do so before the young fellow died at his post, for that, he absolutely believed, might be the ending of it. And he proceeded to tell of the signs of decay he had observed for some time now, and which got more marked day by day.

"Very sorry," replied Mr. Charles Coingold — his name was Charles too. "He had better take a rest. It is awful weather for anybody to get to and fro in." Not that Mr. Charles Coingold spoke from personal experience: he came to the city each morning in his father's comfortable brougham, and returned in it at evening.

"Rest will be his only chance, sir. And I don't much think it will serve him," candidly added Mr. Brown. "He has one foot in the grave already, unless I am mistaken."

"Very sad. What is the disorder?"

"Consumption, I fancy, sir. It is what his father died of."

"Send him to me, Mr. Brown. I'll speak to him."

Mr. Brown found Charles up to his ears with some desk work, on his return below stairs. That despatched, he sent him to the private room. Mr. Charles Coingold, who was then standing with his back to the fire trimming his nails, and knew Charles by sight, was shocked at the shadow that presented itself.

"Why—dear me!—you look very ill, Mr. Lavender!" he exclaimed, closing his penknife and dropping it into his pocket.

"I am not quite well, sir; that is, I don't feel very strong just now; this bad winter has tried me. I shall pick up when the warm weather comes in," added Charles.

"It has been a bad winter," heartily assented his master. "And those omnibuses are draughty things for you, full of damp passengers and dripping umbrellas."

"I generally walk," replied Charles, trying to suppress his cough for a bit.

"*Walk!* What, all the way? Morning and night?"

The young man's transparent face—it had looked so latterly—took a tinge of sensitive colour. "The omnibuses are generally full inside; and I think I am better walking than sitting on the roof in the wind and rain," he answered. But Mr. Charles Coingold, who was quick of apprehension, understood the true reason.

"Mr. Brown has been speaking of you," he said; "he thinks you are hardly strong enough for your work just at present, and that a rest——"

"Are you going to turn me away, sir?" interrupted Charles, in dismay and mental pain.

"No, certainly not," warmly replied Mr. Charles Coingold. "We only think that a little rest might be of service in restoring you to health. Suppose you take holiday for—" a month, he was going to say, but looked at him and hesitated—"for a couple of months. Come back to us, say, on the first of June."

"We are very busy in our room, sir," Charles ventured to say.

"Oh, yes, of course; we are always busy all over the place, so far as I see," resentfully answered Mr. Charles Coingold, for business often prevented holidays for himself. "Never mind that; Mr. Brown will manage it. Stay at home a couple of months and give yourself a good rest."

Charles stood silent, looking rather helpless. "I—I'm afraid I can't well take it, sir," he said at last. "Thank you, all the same."

"But why?" cried the other Charles.

The young man's face was again lighted by its sensitive hectic, and his voice dropped as he gave the answer; but it was given with candour. "I could hardly do so long without my salary, sir."

"Your salary! Oh, you'll draw that all the same. Of course. Stay; I'll write a word."

Mr. Charles Coingold was himself in the habit of spending money freely upon any whim that took him, and he was good-hearted; the firm also was a liberal firm, considerate to its employés. He sat down and wrote a line to the effect that Mr. Lavender was to be paid, now, up to the first of June.

"Take that to the cashier, Mr. Lavender; he will settle with you. And I hope," he added, in a kind tone, "that you will come back to us strong and well."

Charles spoke a few words of grateful thanks, reported to Mr. Brown the result of the interview, and went away with his advanced money in his pocket.

"It was *very* good of Mr. Charles Coingold, was it not," he said at home. "Mother, I can't think how it is that everybody is so kind to me."

"Very good indeed of him, my son," she answered, cheeringly. But to herself she said, "They see what's coming."

In a few short weeks; in fact, before April was quite at an end, there could be no mistake or doubt about it. Charles himself was as sure of it as were those around him. Dr. David, a young practitioner close by, whose friends were on terms of friendship with the Lavenders, gave Charles his best skill and care—for love, not for money. Questioned closely by the patient one evening when they were alone together, the Doctor as good as admitted that little hope remained.

"You need not scruple to tell me, David," Charles urged. "I know it myself better than anybody else does."

"Know what?" cried Dr. David.

"That the end is coming; and is not far off, either."

"Well, well," said the Doctor, we'll do all we can. You may take a turn yet."

He had not much, apparently, the matter with him, except weakness, and that he coughed rather more than at first, and looked even more shadowy than before. But Charles himself felt sure of the inevitable. In that respect he was unlike some other consumptive patients, for many are buoyed up with delusive hope until the very last. He would lie on the sofa, reading his Bible or some other suitable book from which comfort may be derived, and then turn to lighter volumes ; for even the dying need to have the mind recreated at times, and lose themselves in the imaginary joys and sorrows of their kind. From his childhood upwards he had been a lad of reverent feeling, doing his imperfect best to live near to God. Early death had no terrors for him, once the first shock of knowing that he was about to leave this life behind him and the natural yearning to remain in it, which clings to us all, was overcome.

One thing troubled him : his mother's future. He would lose himself in uneasy thought by the hour together, wondering how she was to get on. His salary was all they had to live upon ; it would last probably as long as he should ; but then——?

One fine day when Mrs. Lavender got back from marketing, she found that Charles was out. He had only gone to the seat under the trees, she supposed ; he liked to sit there when the sun was warm and bright. But, chancing to enter his bed-chamber, she saw his every-day clothes lying on a chair ; he must have put on his best, and gone to make a special call on someone.

Charles was in an omnibus making his way to his uncle's office in town. Mr. George Lavender—brother to the late Mr. Charles Lavender, Charles's father—was a solicitor in large practice. The brothers had not at the last been good friends, rather indeed rancorous enemies ; and not the slightest notice in any way had been taken of the widow and her little son by the prosperous lawyer. On their part they had never made any advances to him, believing such would only be repulsed. "But perhaps," thought Charles now, "he may help mother when I am gone." Any way, he was about to ask him.

Mr. Lavender was not at his office. He had been staying at home the last day or two with a severe cold, the clerks informed Charles, in answer to his enquiry ; but he was getting better, they believed.

"I may be able to see him if I go there," thought Charles. "Can I afford a cab, I wonder?"

But he decided that he could not afford a cab. It would cost a shilling, perhaps eighteenpence, and he had not the money to waste. So he walked, slowly in his want of strength, to G—— Square ; and was exhausted, especially in looks, when he got there.

Mr. Lavender was in his study, seated at the table beside a blazing fire, busy with his day's letters, which had been sent to him from the office. When Charles was shown in, he looked so wan, so like a

shade from the grave, and so much as his brother had looked the very last time he had the pleasure of seeing him in life and quarrelling with him, that the lawyer started out of his chair in mortal terror. He was a married man but had no family, and a little help to his poor widowed sister-in-law would never have made his capacious coffers much the lighter. But he had not given it.

"Uncle George," said the young man, when the first few embarrassing minutes were over, "I have come to ask you to do something for my mother. I should never have thought of asking such a thing while I was able to work; but I can no longer do that. They pay me my salary still at Coingolds', but that will soon cease. I shall be gone, and——"

"Gone!" interrupted the lawyer gruffly, for he was feeling very much upset.—"I must say, Charles, you are enough to startle one; you are nothing but a shadow. Where shall you be, pray?"

The shadow did not answer quickly. Involuntarily, as it seemed, his eyes glanced through the window at the blue sky above.

"Don't you perceive that I shall be gone, Uncle George?" he said, in a soft low tone that had a tremble in it. "It can't be very long first now, I think. And then poor mother will have nothing. Nothing at all. I can see no prospect before her whatever."

Mr. George Lavender, who hated to be put out, and always turned cross when he was, sat sideways, tapping his gold pencil case upon the table, and did not answer. He had his face turned to the fire; his legs were crossed.

"It is not much she would need, uncle."

"Not more than a thousand a year I suppose," retorted the lawyer in mockery.

"About fifty pounds, I thought, uncle. We have had to live sparingly, and she is not used to much. A hundred a year does not go far when everything has to come out of it. I have had to dress fairly well, you see; and there was my education——Poor mother!" he broke off with a catch of the breath.

"I suppose you are letting this doubt trouble you?"

"It has troubled me lately all day and all night, Uncle George."

"Well, I'll think about what you have been saying, and let you know my decision," conceded Mr. George Lavender. "Your coming here in this unexpected manner has taken me by surprise, young man, and—and—I'm not accustomed to be surprised, and don't like it."

Charles rose, thanked his uncle, and held out his hand deprecatingly, uncertain whether he might presume to do so. The elder man shook it, however.

"Will you take a glass of wine before you go?"

"N——o, thank you," replied Charles with hesitation. He would have liked the wine very much; he needed something of the sort; but he was so weak and tottery that he feared his head might not be

able to carry it unless he could eat with it. "I think not, uncle; I am not used to wine; and I had better be getting home."

As he went out at the hall door, a lady came up the steps, and he stood aside to let her pass in. Charles knew her for his uncle's wife: Aunt Emma, as he called her when he was a little boy and she used to kiss and play with him. Mr. Lavender was standing at his study door when she entered the hall, apparently gazing at the other door which Charles had gone out of.

"How painfully ill that young man looks!" exclaimed Mrs. Lavender.

"Eh?" responded her husband dreamily, as if his sense of hearing and some of his other senses also had gone a wool gathering. "Who? What?"

"That gentleman just gone out. He is not fit to be about on foot, I am sure. Is he one of your clients, George?"

"That's my nephew," was the grim reply. "Young Charley Lavender."

Mrs. Lavender gave a little shriek of surprise. "Oh George! Why, he is dying!"

"Humph!" grunted Mr. Lavender.

"I did not like to stare at him, he looked so ill; but in the glimpse I caught of his face, it struck me as being like someone's I knew, or had known; it must have been your brother's. Is he dying, George?"

"He thinks he is. Came here to ask me to allow an income to his mother when he shall be gone. When he shall be *gone*; that's how he puts it, Emma."

Mrs. George Lavender made no reply to this. She had always deemed her husband harder than was right in regard to his brother's widow and son; but, being a submissive and non-interfering wife, she had kept her opinion to herself. "Poor Charley!" she sighed now in thought, "poor poor Charley!—and he was such a nice, gentle boy! What is the matter with him?" she asked aloud.

"The same thing, I gather, that was the matter with his father," replied Mr. Lavender.

"Did you give him anything to eat, George?—or ask him to stay luncheon? He looked as though he needed it."

"It is not lunch time yet," retorted the lawyer.

"Indeed it is; close upon it. It wants but five minutes to one."

"I asked him to have some wine, and he refused it; he said he wanted to get home."

Mr. Lavender did not eat much lunch himself that day. When his wife expressed her concern, he put it upon his cold. But he was thinking. He was thinking of the young fellow just gone out; he was thinking of his dead brother, and of their youthful days when the two lads had been all-in-all to each other, and of their united early manhood. The quarrel came later. There were faults on both sides of

course; he could admit that, now that time had mellowed down the force of angry passions; quite as much fault had lain on his side as on his brother Charles's. Yes, and he had not allowed even death, which ought to soften feelings, to soften his. In his proud disdain, he had held aloof and left Charles's widow and Charles's son to get along how they could in this cruel world, or to starve, though he knew they were penniless. And now Charley's short course was run; he could never do aught for him, no matter how good his will might be to do it. Now and then, during the past, a faint idea had presented itself to him of seeking out young Charles and placing him in his office—and of leaving the practice to him later. There was nobody to take it after himself and it would go to the dogs, or to a stranger, which he regarded as about the same thing. But he had not carried the idea out; he had not sought out young Charles, and now it was too late. And all his saved-up money, to whom was that to go?—he and his wife would not live for ever. What if—if—if he had been mistaken all these years?

What if he had been hideously wrong? Somehow Mr. George Lavender was beginning to see things in a light which they had never worn before; his conscience pricked him as if it were a pincushion, pierced with sharp-pointed needles.

After that day Charles faded rapidly. Perhaps the fatigue of the expedition had been too much for him, but his strength, such as it was, seemed to have quite gone. His mother, sitting one afternoon by the sofa on which he lay, could not make-believe any longer. Her smiling face had changed to one of sadness, and suddenly, without anything to lead to it, she burst into a storm of tears.

"Why mother!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, my dear, it is so cruel to think of! this beautiful world, all gladness and sunshine, and—and you are leaving it. Look at the sun shining on those flowers!"

The sunbeams were flickering in through the open window and falling on a small glass vase, containing a rose and some lilies-of-the-valley and a sprig of green verbena, all very lovely and sweet with perfume. It was to these Mrs. Lavender had pointed.

"Mother, has the world had much gladness for me; has it held out even fair hopes for me?" he asked in a low tone. "How much of the sunshine and the flowers have I had time or opportunity to enjoy? Flowers are luxuries: many of them have not come in my way."

She was now sobbing quietly.

"What have my days been, mother?" he went on. "From morning till evening, day in, day out, I was shut up in a dark warehouse, hard at work which I did not like and for which I was not adapted. But in the next world—oh think what the contrast will be! No blazing heat to scorch one or wintry cold to wither: the light there is soft and bright, the flowers are more lovely than these of earth. Sometimes, as I lie here, I try to picture it to my mind."

"Yes, yes, child."

"In that book of travels which David lent us, I read a description yesterday which much impressed me," Charles resumed. "A party of tourists had ascended a mountain and stood there to see the sun rise. The night darkness gave place to a grey dawn, and that, by degrees, to the most lovely sight conceivable. From the first faint primrose light there burst forth upon all things a golden glow, illumining earth and air and sky. Then came the colours; amethyst, rose-pink, crimson, purple, blue, and opals of many shades. Earth was bathed in this radiance, the pinnacles of the mountains glittered in it as if they were borrowing some of the tints of heaven—and the day had begun. Mother, may it not be taken as a type of what *we* shall find?" he continued, after a pause. "When the dark grey night of earth shall close for us, and we awaken in all that glory, our true day will have begun."

He looked through the open window at the clear summer sky. Always, from a very little fellow, Charley had liked to gaze at the blue canopy above him.

"There, in heaven's light, we shall tread the flowery pastures of amaranth, with the friends we knew and loved here, who have gone on before, and those we shall know hereafter; secure in the perfect rest that will never end. Don't grieve for me, mother, dear: I am exchanging earth for Paradise."

"I do not quite like the mood he is in," said Mrs. Lavender that evening, apart to Dr. David.

"No! How is it? Fretful? Repining?"

"It is all hope and peace. He has been talking of the beauties of Paradise, and seems to wish to be there."

"But, my dear lady, what better would you have? It is a delightful frame of mind. I wish all my dying patients possessed it."

"Yes, yes, of course; but that's not what I mean. When this peace, which I am sure comes direct from God, sets in, death must be very near. At least, I fancy so."

"Well, well," spoke the Doctor soothingly. But he did not contradict it.

The next day Mrs. Charles Lavender was surprised by a visit from her long-estranged brother-in-law. It was just a week since Charles's visit to G—— Square—of which visit he had not spoken to his mother. Only a week; yet Charles was so much altered in that short space of time that the lawyer hardly knew him again.

"Bless me! Are you worse?" he exclaimed, as he sank into a seat by the invalid's sofa and sat staring.

"Yes, Uncle George; that is, weaker: the end is quite near now," answered Charles. But his tone was cheerful, and his countenance wore a sweet, patient smile.

Mr. George Lavender gulped down something in his throat. He was thinking that he ought to have come earlier; but he had been

really very poorly these few past days, and he had not supposed there was need for undue hurry.

"Is there no hope?" he asked.

"None," said Mrs. Lavender. There has not really been any for some weeks now. But Charles is happy."

"Dear, dear!" said Mr. George Lavender. And, his heart softened by the situation, his conscience stinging him with its remorse, he spoke out without restraint all the weight that lay upon him.

"It should be different if the time could come over again," he repentantly said; and if actual tears were not in his eyes, a vast sadness was. "I might have done something for you, Mary; I ought to have done it: and Charley might have been to me as my son. I would take him into my office as such now, if he would but recover."

"And—you will help mother?" whispered Charley in his ear.

"Oh, child, *yes*. Be at ease as to that: all her privations are over. If you could only live, we might all have some happy days together. Your aunt Emma has been saying so, Charley."

"It is too late, uncle," sighed Charley. "But we shall have happier days when we all meet *there*."

"This is a wretchedly disappointing world," grumbled Mr. Lavender, rubbing his silk handkerchief over his brow and eyes. "We make ourselves cross and contrary in it, one with another; quarrelling and backbiting and indulging evil tempers. And when some startling event awakens us to our mistakes and sins, and we'd give half our remaining life to rectify them and recal the past, we find we cannot: the time for it is gone by. I am deeply sorry, Charles."

"Dear Uncle George," whispered Charles, his damp and wasted fingers entwining themselves within the stronger ones, "it may be all for the best. Had my life been lived out in this world it might have proved only what you say—all cross and contrary, and a weary pilgrimage."

"A pilgrimage. That's it. Nothing in it for some of us but mistakes, Charley. The wrong tack for a few years, and then a sudden avalanche of heartbreak and repentance. I wish men could learn to love their fellow pilgrims at life's beginning as they find it right to do at its ending!" concluded Mr. George Lavender.

AMONG THE WELSH.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "Cruise of the Reserve Squadron," &c.

Old Mill, North Wales.

ON bidding farewell to Bettws-y-Coed one feels that, in late spring and early summer, before the sight-seeing world has begun to solve the secret of perpetual motion, it must be a small paradise. Paradise, to be perfect, no doubt ought to contain only two people, but Bettws-y-Coed might entertain more than this, and still be charming. At this season, too, Nature is at her best; especially such nature as we find here. Running streams, outspreading trees, green slopes and laughing valleys, an infinite number of small passes leading up into the hills and tempting one to stray into unknown regions: the whole enriched and engoldened (to coin an adjective) by a wealth and warmth of sunshine.

But with us to day it was late autumn; we did not even make up the charmed number, without which paradise itself would seem a desert, and happiness a phantasm; therefore we left Bettws-y-Coed with less regret than might otherwise have been the case. In due time we reached Llandudno Junction, where we will leave the train and take carriage for Penmænmawr.

It was a wild afternoon. The wind blew mightily; clouds flew by in dark masses, and one looked in vain for a break in the sky. The horse pricked up his ears every now and then with a shiver, but struggled bravely against the elements. Even Conway Castle looked frowning, yet always noble and dignified, always beautiful and romantic. The waters of the estuary lashed themselves into a small fury against the rocks on which the castle has stood for

so many centuries. Conway itself was in shadow, its walls and towers under the grey sky more burdened than ever with the weight and woe of the ages.

On through the crooked streets of the town, and out through one of the wonderful old gateways. Beyond, were rows of small houses more or less untidy. Shrill Welsh voices issued from open doorways, and heads to combs and brushes unknown peered through windows. Gutter children seemed to spring up like mushrooms in a field—only that one would very much have preferred the mushrooms. Then all this was left behind, and we passed out into the broader country and still life. Wide, sweeping, undulating moors, solitary and beautiful. Nothing here to shock the nerves or disturb the senses. Vestiges of creation, but not vestiges of man. We were on the old road to Penmænmawr. Coming from Llandudno, as most people do, you have a choice of two roads—the old and the new. The latter skirts the sea board, and is by far the less beautiful. The old road takes you through Conway, a pleasant break in the journey, and brings you out upon this tract of fine, wild, barren country. Great sweeps and slopes of uncultivated hills and undulations immediately around you, backed by higher hills beyond. They are all of a dull, monotonous green, these undulations, stern and solemn, but full of fine tone and effect. To-day, under the dark, hurrying masses of cloud they were doubly grave and gloomy. Their solitude was not their least charm. Scarcely a house was visible, and the only signs of life were a sportsman with his dog and his gun, beating about. Every now and then a shot startled the air, thin smoke went up from the distant brushwood, and by a slight commotion and excitement one could trace the course of the spaniel. With this exception there was neither sight nor sound of human life.

Reaching the top of the mountain path, the wind blew keen and cold. On the right was Penmaenbach, a mountain precipitous almost as the side of a house. Then a gradual descent brought us to Dwygyfylchi, a name pronounced by the driver in a manner which left no doubt as to his being a Welshman, even if there had been a doubt before. But there was none. His English was curious and original, and a great deal of what he said had to be guessed at.

At Dwygyfylchi there was another Fairy Glen, and it was difficult to understand the driver's amiable anxiety that it should on no account be missed, until I found that to do so would enable us to make a halt at a certain favourite "half-way house," as it might be called, in the village. In reality, it was very much more than half way: we were not far from the end of our journey.

Would this fairy glen rival that of Bettws-y-coed? To solve this problem, if for no other reason, it ought to be seen. It proved a somewhat steep walk up a narrow path leading into the mountains, and commenced with a few poverty-stricken cottages or hovels, dirty and wretched. At the doors were some old women, who well matched

their abodes. They might have been beauties once—they were so no longer; and as they gazed after the solitary wayfarer with great black faces under great black Welsh hats, it may be that they lost their hearts—they certainly received none in return.

These doubtful beauties of the past gave place to the undoubted beauties of the present: those of nature, which, whether in youth or age, summer or winter, are unfailing. Here, as the path led upward and onward, the beauty grew wild, though not of a grand or severe type. Wooded hills almost met on either side, and a mountain torrent ran its course over rocks and boulders, every now and then taking a leap, and becoming a miniature fall. Ferns grew in splendid profusion in dark nooks, and struggled out between the stones, refreshed and strengthened by the spray of the waters and the shade of the trees. Very lovely it must be in summer under the full blaze of the sun, which cannot penetrate into this retreat except in glints and snatches, adding laughter and warmth, as it were, to the music of the water: those lovely Songs-without-Words of Nature. To-day all the hills looked wild and solemn; a deep tone rested upon them, partly their own, partly borrowed from the tempestuous sky; flying clouds and broken glimpses of blue that every here and there now began to struggle out for a moment, yielding their tribute of dark and light; shadows of varying degrees, yet without melancholy.

It did not take very long to exhaust the beauties of the Fairy glen and return to the inn at Dwygyfylchi, in the parlour of which Jehu had made himself so comfortable, that he left it with evident reluctance. The remainder of the distance was quickly made. The road was good, the scene picturesque. On the left, hills and passes; hills one behind another, with lovely forms and outlines. On the right a bold, fine sea came in over the beach, in great rollers and angry waves, under the influence of the strong north-east wind. Approaching Penmænmawr, houses reposed here and there in sheltered nooks. Then the uneven street of the small town, and the post-office, where we halted to receive a budget of letters. What pleasanter greeting than this, on arriving at a strange place? Next turning to the right, beyond the post-office, were the well-kept grounds of the Penmænmawr Hotel, and we came to an anchor.

One was quite willing to do so. You fall in love with the place from the very first moment of approach. Its situation—I speak of the whole of Penmænmawr, not only of the hotel—is well-favoured and romantic. The air is bright and sparkling, and more bracing than that of many of the Welsh watering places. It is infinitely pleasanter than most of them. But it is small, and its resources are limited, compared with such towns as Rhyl and Llandudno. In return you have greater solitude and quietness, an infinite number of charming walks, many mountain excursions. The hotel is splendidly situated, almost on the shore, but above the level of the sea. There is nothing between it

and the inrolling tide, except the road and a single line of railway, and sloping banks leading to the beach. You have the eternal sound of the sea in your ears, to bear you company by day and haunt your dreams by night: nature's lullaby, sweetest and most soothing in existence. To the right is Great Orme's Head, and Llandudno, with its crescent bay sleeps under its shadow. In comparison with it, Penmænmawr is small and desolate, and gives you a delicious feeling of being out of the world—a sensation very alien to Llandudno. To the left is Puffin Island, looking, from this distance, little more than a rock rising out of the water, given over to the birds and the rabbits. Beyond, stretches Anglesea, at the extremity of which rises Beaumaris in a gradual and barren-looking slope, its outlines unbroken even by a fringe of trees. Between it and Puffin Island stands a tall white lighthouse upon a solitary rock.

Immediately behind Penmænmawr, hills small and great rise in an amphitheatre. Here and there are plantations of firs, and houses nestle comfortably in the seclusion of spreading oaks and elms. But the hills are, for the most part, wild, rocky and barren, showing a surface of bare stone, or at most covered with moss and furze and bracken. To the right, standing with your back to the sea, are stone quarries; and slope after slope of refuse of broken stone somewhat takes from the beauty of the surrounding hills. Gazing downward from these hills, Penmænmawr lies before you, a small cluster of houses on the hill side, a longer line running parallel with the shore. Penmæn Mawr, the great pile of mountain which gives its name to the place, rises from the sea shore a height of nearly 1,600 feet. It is the spur of a range extending some forty miles to the Rivals, which stand out boldly, though in the distance, as you journey from Carnarvon towards Llanberis.

There are many mountain ascents from this neighbourhood, but the time for climbing had passed, and one could only enjoy them in imagination. Home letters warned one of all sorts of possible and impossible dangers. "Whatever you do, don't go up any mountains—especially avoid Snowdon," would be the text of one day's budget. "We sincerely hope you will not attempt Snowdon. Somebody was known to go up last week, and was never known to come down again," the text of a second, adding mystery to a sense of danger, and somehow bringing up before one the solitary figure that three thousand years ago and more toiled up into Mount Pisgah, and was seen no more. "Several people missing, in the *Times* of this morning; some of them supposed to have been lost on Snowdon; pray take warning," the burden of a third. But cautions were needless. Clouds and all the elements conspired against mountain climbing, their certain enjoyment and their possible risks.

As a foil to these warnings was the advice of a dignified and remarkable old gentleman in the drawing-room of the hotel. We had it to ourselves one night, and suddenly looking up from his

book—it was Butler's "Analogy," and he seemed to be getting out of his depth if one might judge by a look in his eyes which indicated pressure on the brain—he abruptly remarked:

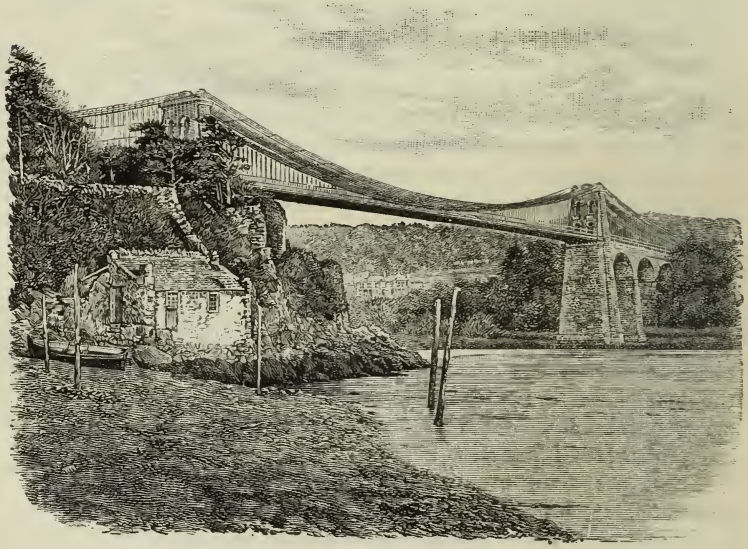
"*Have* you been up Snowdon?"

"No," was the reply.

"Then you may say that you have seen nothing of Wales," with a mixture of scorn and pity.

"Or rather that I have not seen *all* Wales," the modest correction.

"That you have seen *nothing* of Wales," came in direct contradiction. "But if you have not been up Snowdon, perhaps you have been down the Wye?"



Suspension Bridge, Menai Straits.

Without perceiving the connection evidently existing in his mind between the top of Snowdon and the valley of the Wye, I replied that good fortune had made me well acquainted with the river.

"Ah!" he said, "I suppose so. And seen Tintern, no doubt?"

"Yes."

"By the light of a full moon, of course?"

"Yes; but that was accident, not design. The moon happened to be at the full at the time of a certain visit to Tintern."

"Of course! Everybody sees Tintern by full-moonlight. For my part, I find that in the tourist season, if you are to believe everyone, it is full moon all through July, August, and September. Now, sir," said this extraordinary old gentleman, "I don't believe one in a hundred who says he has seen Tintern by full-moonlight. Yet I have

done much more than that. I have seen Tintern under the full blaze of the *Magnesia* light, and the full moon was a fool to it."

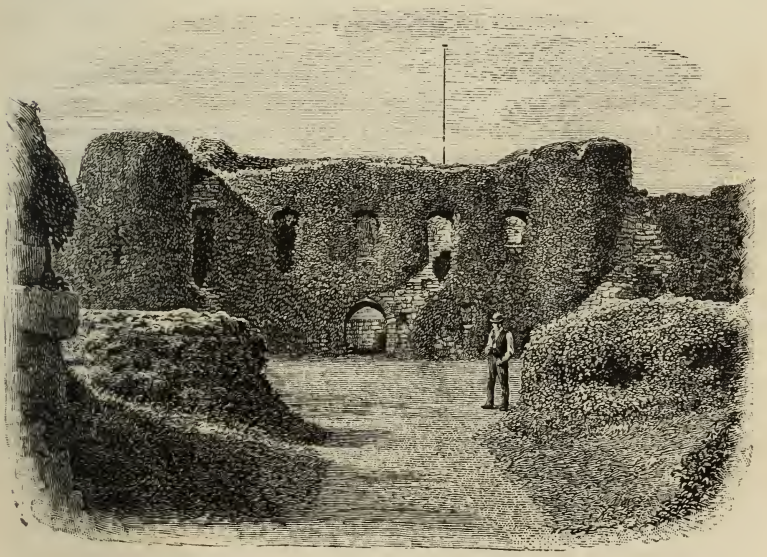
"Was it finer than the top of Snowdon?" I ventured to ask.

The look cast from his eyes would have cremated anything softer than a stone. He returned to his book for a moment.

"Have you read this?" he asked presently, holding it up. "It is Butler's *Anatomy*."

I replied that I had read it, without venturing to quote the misquoted title.

"Wonderful book," continued the old gentleman. "Most convincing. Turns me quite upside down. Makes me feel that I don't know where I am, or what I'm doing. It is therefore clear that there must



Beaumaris Castle.

be a great deal in it.—Pray, sir, who is your favourite Bible character?"

One began to feel uncomfortable. This was something beyond mere eccentricity. Was it one's duty to go out and warn the young lady who received all the hotel guests on their arrival with so much patronising condescension?

But my cross-examiner was waiting for an answer to his strange question.

"Requires consideration?" he retorted. "Do you mean to say you haven't long ago made up your mind as to your favourite character in scripture? Allow me to tell you, sir, that procrastination is the thief of time quite as much in opinion as in action. Now mine, I have no hesitation in saying, is Naaman. There is a great deal concerning

him that we don't hear about. Naaman, you know, was a *leopard*: but my private opinion is that he had quite a *compilation* of disorders. He was told by the Prophet to wash seven times in Jordan, a clear proof to my mind that he had seven complaints, and that each dip was to cure one of them. I once wrote to the Archbishop upon the subject."

"And what was his answer?"

"He never replied. But I am convinced the letter miscarried. If it had not, I daresay he would have written a book upon the subject: probably have dedicated it to me."

After this, it was somewhat of a relief to see the old gentleman rise majestically, and once more commending Snowdon to my attention, depart in peace. I never saw him again. The next day he had left the hotel, but whether to go up Snowdon or down the Wye, did not transpire.

Though Penmænmawr feels pleasantly out of the world—at any rate in the month of October, when the world for the most part has gone back to its habitual haunts—you may quickly reach from it any part of Wales that you wish to explore. The station is almost at the very door of the hotel, and the porter fulfils a sort of dual existence, for he is also boots at the inn: sufficient testimony that the station is not over-burdened with traffic. The line towards Bangor skirts the sea, and in one part passes over it at high water, making the journey a very pleasant one. In the distance, Bangor reposes in a hollow, and Penrhyn Castle stands amidst trees backed by green hills. Llanfairfechan, the first station you come to, seems a quaint, quiet, straggling little place, with possibilities of being pleasant in summer. The sea rolls in over a broad, flat beach. To the left, are mountains and mountain passes: "green hills far away" dotted about with small colonies of houses. Presently the train steams into Bangor. You have left the sea and the distant hills, and for the moment feel very much shut in.

For Bangor lies in a hollow, and must be warm, relaxing, and unpleasant to live in. It is small and unpretending, but commercially important to Wales. Its chief object of interest is the small cruciform cathedral, of mixed styles of architecture. It has a low flat roof and a low tower, and looks as if it had gradually sunk from its original level from the effects of its depressing surroundings. Here we reach a still lower depth even than that of the main street. Stone steps take you down to the sad and sombre churchyard, and having inspected the building, which is soon over, and thought of the famous old Bishop who once blundered in his grammar and thereby easily earned everlasting fame, you feel that Bangor has little more to offer you in the way of attraction.

Its narrow, crooked streets, the close confined feeling lurking about the town, make you long to get away into space, where at least you can breathe, and look out upon a larger world. For this reason the

pleasantest hotel to stop at is the "George," at Bangor Ferry, notwithstanding their charge for driving to Beaumaris, which was preposterous. It is away from the town, overlooking the waters of the Menai Straits, near the Britannia and suspension bridges. From hence you quickly reach Beaumaris. Crossing the Straits over the suspension bridge, once considered an eighth wonder of the world, you are at once in Anglesea, and continue your journey on the road skirting the picturesque Menai banks. There is a good deal of shipping and life upon the water in the way of small craft, including a steamer which plies between Bangor and Beaumaris.

The latter is by no means a lively looking town, yet in summer it is said to be popular and much frequented. Perhaps it may be asked what place is not much frequented in these days? But Beaumaris at the mouth of the Menai Straits has a great amount of beach, and if its own shores are flat and uninteresting, the scenery around makes up for that by its extreme beauty. A long line of hills rising from the sea and falling back far inland in endless outlines and undulations, stretching round by Aber and Llanfairfechan and Penmænmawr, ending with Llandudno on the opposite coast, and the fine headlands of Great and Little Orme's Head. All this under sunshine and blue skies must form a picture whose charms cannot be exaggerated, and here perhaps is the reason why Beaumaris is so much "wooed and won."

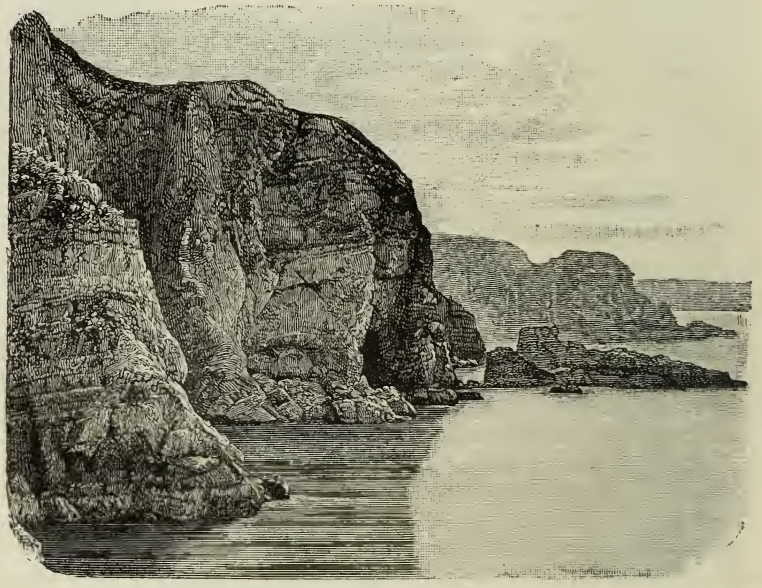
It also has its castle. A large ivy-clad ruin, now little more than a shell. Like Conway Castle it dates back to the days of Edward I, but though very much larger it is infinitely less beautiful. The outer wall possesses a gunner's walk and ten low Moorish towers, and the castle itself stands within the walls, a quadrangular building thickly covered with splendid ivy, where, no doubt, the owls and the bats have a fine time of it.

A woman unlocks the great gates to admit you, asks a modest fee in return, and leaves you to roam at will. From the walls you may listen to the breaking of the waves upon the shore, and watch them rolling in. But to-day it is so deserted and melancholy, the ruin itself is so depressing in its utter abandonment, that you are very soon glad to leave it all and return to the conveyance without the gates, that waits to carry you back to more cheerful scenes.

Not that Jehu this morning very much improved the occasion. A well disposed youth, but hard to be understood, who seemed to go off into trances with eyes wide open, whilst retaining full command over his horse. His reply to any question would come at the end of a minute or two, quite to the point when it did come, but startling. Once or twice on attempting an immediate answer, it was, as the French would say, à tort et à travers, and a repetition of the question brought no better result. Altogether, he was a psychological study, and would no doubt have been invaluable to a medium. As a companion, even in a humble sense of the word, he was a failure.

From Bangor I took train for Holyhead. The journey across Anglesea is very tame and uninteresting. It might almost be a desert, for all visible signs of life and civilisation. Flat fields and dreary wastes and marshy moors on either hand, and scarcely a hill to vary the monotonous landscape. There are small oases in this wilderness in the shape of occasional railway stations. The train stops; no one gets in or out; the porter pronounces some wonderful name, all consonants as usual, and the train steams on again. The people of Anglesea are said to speak very little English.

But Anglesea has a venerable history, a long pedigree, and was of

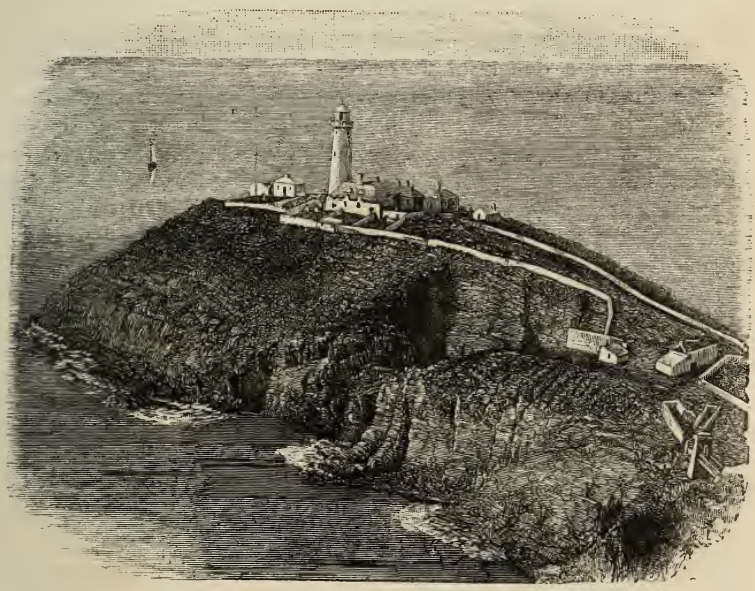


Rocks at Holyhead.

some use in the far off days. Before the Christian era it gave refuge to the Druidical priests, and many of their remains still exist. The Romans called the island Mona, a soft, sad-sounding name well suited to its present aspect. In all the flat, bare fields you scarcely see a tree, and no trace whatever of the fine market towns, and scarcely an indication of the 50,000 inhabitants. But with time and patience and an arrival at Holyhead, perhaps you will see only too large a proportion of this goodly population. Like troubles, they come down upon you—not singly.

So we found it. Presently there were signs of a change. A mountain loomed out before us, and in a few moments the train stopped at Holyhead. The hotel is at the station and belongs to the railway company. The windows of the coffee-room look on to the harbour

and the boats running to and from Ireland. At night the harbour is lighted up by electricity, and great pathways of light are thrown across the water. These seem to attract the fish, for men throw their lines into them and have capital sport. One fisherman I watched seemed to catch eels as fast as he threw in his line, and in less than an hour walked off with a full basket. It formed quite a weird and picturesque scene. Under the blaze of the lamps it was bright as day; the men stood out, their faces lighted up by the glare until every play and expression of feature was visible. All this only increased the surrounding darkness. Far down the harbour might be traced the



South Stack.

line of boats by their lights, and these, and distant voices shouting out some order and startling the air, were the only visible or audible signs of a stirring world.

About eleven o'clock that night, the Irish boat slowly steamed up the harbour and came alongside. She was crowded with passengers, and the glare of the electric light proved only too plainly that for many of them the passage had been a very mauvais quart d'heure. Trains were in waiting, and the way in which many of the travellers sank into their soft cushions and became total eclipses, told its own tale. For a time everything was noise, bustle and confusion: people running about frantically; losing each other only to find each other again; struggling at the small platform bar for refreshment; rushing back on board for parcels and baggage forgotten. Many of the

who appeared from the steerage part of the boat were Irish men and women of the lowest type. But presently order was resolved out of chaos. All who were going on, settled down, guards gave the signal, engines whistled, away went the trains. The electric lights were put out, and the station was left to solitude and darkness.

Nothing can be said in praise of Holyhead itself. It consists of small straggling streets, small houses and shops, the greater part looking neglected and unattractive. Of many of the people, it almost seemed that the less said the better. The street children gabbled Welsh; but a great many of the inhabitants nevertheless are Irish, and this will account for a great deal.

But leaving the town behind, its unpleasant sights and sounds, you may take a delightful walk to the breakwater, one of the finest works in the world. It is entirely built of stone brought from quarries in the neighbourhood. This breakwater makes Holyhead one of the largest harbours of refuge in existence, covering an area of four hundred acres, where at any state of the tide the largest vessel may ride at anchor. The breakwater is of great length, stretching out into the deep sea, and the lighthouse at the end can only be reached in comfort when the water is calm. To-day there was not much sea on, but it was the dying away of what had been a fearful storm, and the waves broke over the stonework in showers of spray. The whole scene was so exhilarating and refreshing, that to turn back and leave the winds and the waves was impossible. The sun went down in flames of red, and from the top of the lighthouse sea and sky were wild and grand. Town and harbour on the one hand, on the other a wide waste of waters; afar off, the lonely Skerries. The men lit up the revolving apparatus, and in a few minutes, as if in answer to the signal, out steamed the boat for Ireland. She struggled over the harbour bar and began to pitch and toss and shiver in a way that made it very evident there was more sea on than at first sight had seemed possible. Round she came, steadily ploughing the waters, passing near the lighthouse and going her way under the shadow of the Holyhead mountain.

It is this "Head" which gives its name to the town. A wild mountain covered with heather, sloping upwards on the one side, rising almost perpendicularly out of the water on the other to a heighth of some seven hundred feet. On the slopes you will find quite a small colony of abandoned houses, once inhabited by many of the fifteen hundred men employed for years in building the breakwater. But when the work was finished the men departed, and the little settlement became, so to say, a ruin. "And so, sir," said Jehu, as we drove one morning to the South Stack, "you may now have quite a fine house for fourpence a week, and a healthy situation into the bargain."

About the latter qualification there was no doubt. A fresh s breeze was blowing, bracing and exhilarating beyond anything I h

yet found in Wales. Before us was the grand chain of the Carnarvonshire hills, looking like misty, far-off dream mountains, inexpressibly beautiful. Their soft and distant outlines might be faintly traced, wrapped in a purple haze. Seldom, said the driver, did they bear this appearance, which seemed due to electrical disturbances in the air, and portended rain. True prophets, indeed, were they.

Rounding the "head," and ascending all the time, we came in view of the South Stack lighthouse, perched on its solitary rock, and detached from the mainland. A stack of rocks about half a mile in circumference rising out of the sea, holding the lighthouse, and the houses for the keepers and their families. The winds blow and the waves beat round it all the year round, and the wild birds scream and clang. You look down upon it from a height, a wonderfully picturesque and interesting sight, suggestive of freedom and solitude, and everything that is grand and bracing.

A rough staircase has been made in the solid rock, and down this zigzag one must go, until a locked door bars further progress. A huge bell gave signal to the men, and presently in answer down came one of them to unbar and unbolt. It was quite a long way off, and the wonder was that in all the roar of the wind which swept up and round the Head, the bell should have been heard at all.

The rocks here are indeed splendid, and from the lighthouse one had full view of them. Nothing could exceed the grandeur and wildness of the scene. An immense mass of variegated perpendicular rock on the one side; on the other, rocks broken and jagged, shelving and uneven, and many caves and hollows; great overhanging bits, and other rocks rising out of the sea. The wind hurried and shrieked round these rocks as if it would tear them up by the roots, and the waves dashed and roared and foamed in eternal unrest at their base. Wild birds flew and fluttered about, as if they too enjoyed all these wild harmonies of nature, felt all their beauty and sublimity. In summer time, said the keeper, the rocks can scarcely be seen for the birds; the air is darkened by them, and above the utmost roaring of the winds and waves may be heard their mournful clang. The sea rushes into the caves and hollows with a booming roar like the noise of many thunders. All down the broken and diversified coast it swirls and eddies in mighty waves of foam and froth, and the wild birds build and sing, and even the peregrine falcon here finds its home.

I had seen no sight in Wales equal to this: nothing half so sublime. This alone was worth a journey to Holyhead, and the barrenness of Anglesea and the ugliness of Holyhead itself, all was forgotten and redeemed. It needed something of the kind to restore one's equilibrium after a night passed in the hotel—a sort of earthly pandemonium. The railway is on either side of it, and trains were running in and out, and engines were shrieking all night long, or so it seemed to one's disturbed imagination. As if this were

not torment enough, on one side the room was a lift, on the other a staircase, the noisiest lift and the most frequented staircase, without doubt, in or out of Great Britain. Repose was out of the question, and it is fortunate for the world at large that most people go straight through Holyhead without stopping; whilst the few who do bring themselves to an anchor there, seldom remain more than one night.

If one could live in the lighthouse on the South Stack rock, there one could find peace and happiness, and, amidst all the roaring of the wind and breaking of the waves, all the clang and scream of the wild birds, enjoy absolute repose. Here, one is indeed and in truth out of the world; alone, yet without the depressing stillness and solitude of mountain retreats, where the very silence of the trees and the immobility of the heights weigh upon the senses with almost fatal effect.

But to-day there was no dwelling in the lighthouse. We had to look our last upon those grand rocks, that breaking sea. The keeper came down to the portal, which closed behind me. Jacob's Ladder was mounted—a rough and rude Jacob's Ladder, but grand and majestic. Once more back in Holyhead, the streets looked dirtier and narrower and more crooked than ever. We had passed from the sublime—not to the ridiculous, but to the disagreeable. All one cared for now was for the hour to sound that should bear one away to fresh fields and pastures new.

This came at length, and the noisy hotel was left without regret. Away went the train across the barren wastes of Anglesea. Holyhead quickly faded in the background, and before us, but far away and still faintly outlined, were the hills of Carnarvonshire. The train passed through the Tubular Bridge over the Menai Straits and steamed into Bangor. Here one changed trains for Carnarvon.

The journey from this point was more picturesque and interesting. Banks and slopes of trees, endless reaches of leaves shimmering and glinting in the sunshine, the waters of the Menai on the right; waters which gradually widened. From having been very much above them, we came down to their level, and on reaching Carnarvon they had expanded almost to a sea. At Carnarvon I halted. Who does not halt here, for the sake of the old Castle, if for no other reason? A few moments were sufficient to change the scene from the train to the Royal Hotel. Once settled, and going forth to reconnoitre, the first thing to arrest attention was the sea: a broad sheet of water flushed with a crimson glow until it looked almost a lake of fire. In the horizon a long line of wonderful light issued from beyond the clouds. The sun in a red ball, wrathful but very splendid, dipped, and sank, and disappeared. In a moment there was an insensible change. Twilight fell and strengthened, and darkness covered the face of the earth. But the far-off glow in the west had been as a vision not of earth but of heaven, and the flush upon the water haunted the memory long after night had fallen.

CATHERINE *versus* KATE.

"CATHERINE!"

"Yes, sir."

"Is there anything the matter with my eyes, Catherine?"

"Allow me to look, sir."

The first speaker was an athletic and handsome man, the beauty of whose intelligent face was marred by the defectiveness of his expression. His interlocutrix was a tall and dignified woman. She was neatly attired in black silk, and she wore an apron and a white cap. Her complexion was beautiful, her features were regular. But her comeliness was defaced by large blue spectacles and by the defectiveness of her teeth. Notwithstanding these blemishes, however, the housekeeper presented a very pleasing appearance, and as she approached her master, an expression of peace stole over his countenance.

"Allow me to look at your eyes, sir," she said.

He permitted her, without reluctance, to do this, and, standing with her back to the light, she seemed to examine them attentively.

"I see nothing, amiss, sir," said she, in a tone which was at once cheerful and respectful.

"Nothing?" he rejoined. "No redness? no signs of inflammation?"

"None whatever, sir."

The master sighed.

"I am a very sensitive person," he remarked.

"Yes, sir."

"And I have a presentiment that my eyes may be sorely tried to-day, Catherine."

"Indeed, sir!"

"Yes, sorely tried. I should like to tell you why. Can you spare me half-an-hour?"

"I am at your service, sir."

"Then sit down, Catherine. I can't talk while you stand."

The housekeeper obeyed. She placed a chair at a modest distance from her master and seated herself, folding her hands meekly.

"I wish you didn't wear spectacles, Catherine!" said the gentleman.

"I am sorry to displease you, sir," returned she. "But they are essential to me."

"I beg your pardon. I am getting old, and you must excuse my crossness. To-day is my birthday. I am thirty-eight."

"Indeed, sir! You look much younger."

"Thank you, Catherine. You flatter me. But I am thirty-eight to-day, and in two years I shall be forty. It is a depressing thought.

People of forty can no longer pretend to youth. I am growing old. Is it not so?"

"No, sir. I believe, if you could be induced to go into the cricket-field and take a bat—nay, if you could be persuaded to enter a ball-room and take a partner—that you would do as well as the youngest, and *feel* as young as you look."

"Catherine, beware!" cried he. "You don't know how you are tempting a man who has renounced society and given up all idea of enjoyment! Do you know that I was once the Captain of the Southernshire Muffs? And do you know that I was once considered the best dancer in Southernshire?"

"I am not surprised to hear it, sir."

"That is strange—since you have never known me as anything but a hypochondriacal book-worm."

"You take in the *Field*, sir, and I have often seen you absorbed in the cricketing news. And as to dancing, sir, no one can see you walk without knowing that you can dance!"

The master smiled.

"Yes, Catherine, I have been a great cricketer and a great dancer. I was jovial among men and polished among ladies. I was social and I loved society. I am not vain, but I should like you to know that many people expressed regret when I retired from the world."

"I don't wonder, sir."

"You are very kind, Catherine. Yes, they regretted my departure. Only *one* said nothing. Her unkindness wounded me and I fled."

"I am sorry for that," said the housekeeper.

"You are a faithful friend, Catherine, and I feel it due to you that I should tell you something of my past life. How many years is it since we have lived together in this solitary place?"

"It is only three months, sir."

"Only three months! Well, it must then be four months since I became the owner of this property—since I left the world and became a hypochondriacal book-worm. Before that, I was active and in good health. But I was poor; and not all my prowess in cricket and dancing could win me my heart's desire. I loved, Catherine."

"Indeed, sir!"

"Yes, I loved. I loved my beautiful cousin Kate. But her father was rich and I dared not say to her, 'Come, share the poor barrister's crust.' So I loved her, but did not speak."

"You loved her, sir? I wonder how men love?"

"I loved her from the bottom of my heart. I liked to be always with her. I couldn't bear to see her talking to other men. I loved to give her presents. Catherine, I denied myself the necessaries of life to give her flowers and pretty things. She smiled sweetly and took them, and then she turned round and flirted with another man—a wretch called Lord Angelo."

"She turned and flirted at once, sir, do you mean?"

"No. She smiled on me for some years. Then Lord Angelo came into the neighbourhood and she smiled on him. I was at a discount. She clapped her hands when he made one ridiculous run, and she looked aside while I was bowling down half a dozen wickets. And when Lady X. gave a ball she danced with Lord Angelo all the evening, and never once with me. She tore my heart to pieces, Catherine. We had been playmates from childhood, and she knew I loved her, and yet she turned voluntarily from me and gave herself to this miserable Angelo!"

"Gave herself! Did she become engaged to him, sir?"

"No. But she encouraged his attentions and slighted me. She may be engaged to him now—or even married to him. I do not care. She was heartless."

"Nay, sir, you must not abuse one woman to another. Supposing you misled the lady? Supposing she loved you and was mortified by your silence? Supposing she employed Lord Angelo as a bait to lure you on? To be sure, that is an old artifice and a stupid one. But when a woman loves—and thinks her lover half-hearted—even an old artifice may serve her turn."

"Half-hearted, Catherine! But I loved her so dearly that I went on thorns when I saw her with that little jackanapes!"

"That is how men love, sir. You cannot understand how she loved."

"But she did not love, Catherine."

"How are you sure of that, sir, if you never spoke to her?"

"She would have given me to understand, had she loved me. We were cousins and very intimate."

"Ah, sir, the most intimate cousin is still a woman! Perhaps she thought that she did give you to understand, and you understood not. A woman's hint is sometimes too fine for a man to see. You should remember, sir, that when you deal with women, you deal with organisms so tender and delicate that no masculine eye but Shakespeare's has ever been able to detect their subtleties."

"Catherine, you speak from a noble heart! But I—who have loved—know more."

"It seems to me, sir, that you mistook manly jealousy for love, and womanly pride for indifference."

"You think she loved me?"

"It is not for me to express an opinion, sir."

"Oh, Catherine, if I thought—! But no—I must steel my wounded heart. You have not heard all. Four months ago my godfather died; he left me his fortune and this place. Suddenly, I found I was a rich man."

"And—you hastened to your cousin, sir, and—told her of your fortune and asked her to share it?"

"Not so, Catherine. I employed finesse. I could not forget the monkey Angelo who had been always rich, and I determined to

discover if she really loved me. So I went to her and said, 'Frankly, Kate, I love you well, and I live in two rooms in a narrow street, and I fare hardly, and when I go abroad, I walk or take an omnibus, and my pleasures are few and cheap. Will you share all this with me?'"

"And did she say no, sir?"

"Not exactly. She flushed very red and she rose up and said, 'John, how dare you treat me with such contempt?'—and she swept from the room, like a very duchess. For she is as tall as you are, Catherine, and when she chooses, very stately and majestic."

"And from this, sir, you think the lady did not love you?"

"Surely, my good Catherine! She reproached me for asking her to share my poverty."

"But you had become rich, sir."

"She did not know of that."

"Oh, sir, I think you must mistake. News travels fast. Mark my words: she *did* know, and, knowing, did she not mean, 'How dare you treat me with such contempt thus to employ finesse to discover if I love?' Sir, I tell you again that men know naught of the delicacy of a woman's sensibilities! Indeed, sir, I can but echo your cousin's words: How dared you try to deceive her? How dared you doubt her single-heartedness? How dared you try her nobility? Oh, fie, sir! How dared you approach the woman you loved with a falsehood upon your lips?"

"Catherine! you take away my breath!"

"I beg your pardon, sir. I apologise. I spoke warmly, sir, because my own heart felt very full. Your story reminds me of my own, and it recals past days when—if I was not entirely happy—at least the hope of happiness lay before me. It was a cruel thrust which took that hope from me. Heaven help the poor lady whom you say you loved, if she has suffered as I have!"

"Whom I *say* I loved! Catherine, you go too far! Whom I *say* I loved! Why, I loved her so well that it is for her sake I have shut myself up here, seeing no one, going nowhere! Catherine, I believed you were my friend."

"I am indeed your friend, sir. But I am a woman, and my heart aches for the woman to whom my friend and master has given pain. I—who have endured the like—know how deeply you must have wounded her."

He sighed. "But she was over hasty with me. She went away at once, out of my reach. I meant no harm."

"Sir, the boy who plays with a pistol means no harm. But he may shoot some one to death, notwithstanding."

"She has made me no sign since."

"What sign would you have a proud woman make to a half hearted lover, sir?"

"Catherine, your words are very bitter, but your face is kind. We were cousins. She might have sent for me, or written to me."

"May I remind you again that men do not understand women? I—who am also a proud woman and who have also endured insult from a man—seem to know more of your cousin than you do."

"Catherine, your tongue is sharp. But tell me—for it kills me to dwell upon myself—what man has dared to insult you?"

"The man I loved, sir."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, sir. I had loved him all my life. I only waited for him to speak. I loved him, sir, with a love of which you have no idea. The very world was sacred to me, because he dwelt in it. I thought of him morning, noon, and night. I fell asleep with his image before my eyes, and I awoke with his name upon my lips. If he gave me a rose-bud, I treasured its withered petals; if he touched my needle-work, it became hallowed to me. When he smiled, I was in heaven; when he talked, the society of the gods was mine. I saw no man but him. All other men were pigmies in my sight. He so possessed me that when I looked in the glass, I marvelled that my face was mirrored there and not his!"

"And this man did not return your love, Catherine?"

"He returned it, sir, as men do return love. He liked to monopolise me. He couldn't bear to see me talking to other men. He heaped me with presents and pretty things. He thought, poor fellow! that women like fans and gloves better than esteem and confidence. But he doubted me, sir. He played with my finest feelings. He tried to test my love—he, who did not know what love was!"

"He was a villain, Catherine. But how did he test your love?"

"Sir, he had been unsuccessful. Suddenly, he achieved a triumph. I heard of it, and my heart leapt; and I—who believed in him—thought he would come and offer me his fulness. He did come: but he tried to deceive me. He said, 'I am a disappointed man: will you share failure and mortification with me?' Oh, sir, it was a base and unworthy trick! I would have shared a hovel with him. But when he had a wide house ——"

"He was a brute, Catherine! He deserved to be horse-whipped!"

"Ah, do not say so, sir! He was to me only what you were to your cousin."

"Catherine!"

"Yes, sir. You—both of you—handled the love of a woman to try its strength and its worth. Your touch was agony!"

"Oh Catherine—when I loved her so much!"

"When you *doubted* her so much, sir! You thought—as many men think—that a woman who weds a rich man weds for riches."

The master groaned.

"Catherine, for the first time since you entered my service you have been cruel to me," he said.

"I ask your pardon, sir. I have overstepped my province. I must beg you to forget what I have said. I will leave you now, sir."

"Nay, wait a moment. I told you this was my birthday. It is also hers. She is exactly eight years my junior."

"Is she, sir!"

"I have a feeling that she may come and see me to-day. For many years we have kept this day together."

"Indeed, sir!"

"I would rather not see her, Catherine. As you say, I doubted her and I offended her. I believe that she will come. But she will come with reproaches, not with love. I cannot refuse to see her; but I would rather not look upon her face."

"It is not for me to offer advice, sir; but before you take a decided step, let me implore you to remember how little you know of a woman's heart. You angered your cousin, but no doubt she has long ago forgiven you, and would go to the North Pole, or journey through Sahara, with her hand in yours. Sir, I speak from my own heart and my own experience."

"Yes, Catherine. *You* have loved. My cousin does not know what love is. She go to the North Pole, or journey through Sahara with her hand in mine! No, no. She will come to-day; but she will never look kindly on me again. I cannot brook her scornful gaze. At the very thought, my eyes seem to burn. Surely, surely they are inflamed! Look again, Catherine!"

The housekeeper examined his eyes once more. "They look weak, sir," she said. "Your eyes should avoid contact with the light, sir. Would you allow me to bandage them?"

"Certainly, Catherine."

She arose and quitted the room, soon returning with a large silk handkerchief, with which she tied up her master's eyes.

"Can I do anything more for you, sir?" asked the housekeeper.

"No, thank you," he replied.

Then Catherine retired, and the master was left alone. He did not stir. He continued sitting where the housekeeper had left him, giving way to a profound and melancholy reverie.

"She did not love me," he thought to himself. "She is not a woman like Catherine, to love as Catherine loved. She never seemed unhappy. She was immeasurably angry with me for a very small offence. And she has never written or taken any notice of me since I came here. No! I will not look upon her face again."

As he uttered this resolution aloud, a servant opened the door and announced that a lady wished to see him; and, ere he could reply, the rustling of a silken skirt made him aware that the lady had already entered the apartment. Then the door was closed. He and she were together, and alone.

"Why, John!" cried the lady.

"Is that you, Kate?" asked he.

"It is I, John. My dear John, what on earth is the matter with you? Are you ill? Why are your eyes bandaged?"

"Inflammation threatens them, Kate."

"Inflammation! I am very sorry. Are you in pain?"

"No. I am not exactly in pain. Sit down. It is kind of you to come and see me."

"I came because it is your birthday and mine, and we have always kept our birthdays together, John, since I was eight and you were sixteen."

"Thank you, Kate."

"Last year we had a picnic on this day."

"We had, Kate. You drove to the place in a dogcart—with Lord Angelo."

"Yes, John. No one else offered to drive me, if you recollect aright."

"I would have driven you with the greatest pleasure, had you suggested it."

"Indeed! Bien obligé, monsieur! I suppose you would also have danced with me at Lady X——'s ball—where you sulked all the evening in a corner—if I had suggested it! You are singularly gracious, John. But the end of the world is not yet, and I am still a woman."

"Have you come all this way to reproach me, Kate?"

"No, John. I came to ask how you were, and if you enjoyed life in this secluded place."

"I do *not* enjoy life; and it is probable I shall never enjoy life again. I can do nothing but resign myself to my fate."

"It is not a bad fate: you are a rich man, and ——"

"Pardon me, it is a very bad fate. I am separated for ever from the person I love best in the world."

"From the person you love best in the world! I wonder how men love, John?"

"Catherine expressed the same wonder half-an-hour ago."

"Catherine! Who is Catherine?"

"My housekeeper. The person from whose society I now derive my only happiness."

"Really, John, you astonish me!"

"Catherine is a lady, Kate. I engaged her, because in height and complexion she was like you."

"You flatter me, indeed! Is she like me in other respects?"

"Not very. She is older and graver, and she devotes herself to me."

"Where did she come from?"

"I don't know. She presented herself here, and I engaged her because she pleased me. As I told you, she reminded me of you."

"And do you really know nothing about her, John?"

"I *did* know nothing whatever, Kate. To-day she has told me a part of her private history. She has told me the story of her heart."

"Are you sure she is not a designing woman?"

"Quite, my dear Kate. What designs could she have?"

"She might design to win your affection, John."

"Nay, Kate. She has loved."

"Or thinks she has loved, John."

"I tell you, Kate, she has loved. If you had heard her passionate language, you would not doubt it. There is a depth in that woman's soul which no shallower mind could fathom."

"Which *I* could not fathom, you mean! Beware, John! You take a mighty interest in this Catherine."

"I do. She makes my life happy—that is, as happy as it ever can be now."

"Some day you will make her an offer, John."

"I! I make an offer to any woman! No, Kate. Never again!"

"Some day, I say, John, you will make her an offer, and, as a cousin, I will give you a piece of advice. Couch your offer in honest words. Be a man, and don't fancy you are only acceptable because you are rich. Remember that a woman who weds a rich man does not necessarily wed for riches."

"That is the very thing she said just now, Kate."

"Is it? She is a wise person, then, and a true woman."

"She is, indeed, a true woman. Alas, that such a woman should have misplaced her affections! She loved a fellow, who tried to keep a secret from her—who came to her, pretending to be other than he was—the scoundrel!"

"Now, don't abuse him, John! It seems to me that he only behaved to Catherine as you behaved to me."

"You are cruel, Kate. Would you compare me to the villain who insulted Catherine?"

"I cannot say. Ask Catherine what she thinks—she, in whose soul, as it appears, there are depths my shallow mind ——"

"Nay! Not even Catherine shall come between your image and me."

"Thank you, John. It is pleasant to know that when you are about to wed Catherine, you can still think kindly of Kate!

"I am not about to wed Catherine. She is my good friend, but she will never be my wife. No, not even if you marry Lord Angelo."

"I marry Lord Angelo!"

"Yes. Are you not going to do so?"

"Certainly not. What! Marry Lord Angelo—an empty-headed flirt, a well-drest nonentity! No, no, John! When I marry, my husband shall be a man of sense. I have seen such a man once, and he is not Lord Angelo."

"Who is he?"

"Well, John, he is about your age and your height, and your size. And he is clever, and has read a thousand books, and he knows everything, and people call him a rising man; and yet he can run and row, and ride and play cricket, and even dance, with the best."

"Upon my word, he must be an admirable Crichton!"

"He is, John."

"And do you love the fellow?"

"Well, John, I will leave you to judge. I love him so well that the world is sacred to me because he dwells in it. I think of him night and day. I fall asleep with his image before my eyes, and I awake with his name upon my lips. If he gives me a flower, I treasure its withered petals; if he touches my needlework, it becomes hallowed to me. When he smiles, I am in heaven; when he talks, the society of the gods is mine. I see no man but him. All other men seem to me like pigmies. He so possesses me that when I look in the glass, I marvel to see my own face there, and not his!"

"Why Catherine said these very things of the man she loved!"

"I am not surprised. We are both women; and when a woman loves, this is how she loves!"

"But this fellow, Kate! Who is he?"

"Who is Catherine's false lover, John?"

"I don't know. I never asked. I didn't care to ask. Why should I—what is Catherine to me? Who is the man whom you love, Kate? Good heavens! I could strangle him! Who is he, I say? Strange that he should turn up the moment I went away!"

"Don't excite yourself, John! You will increase the inflammation in your eyes."

"But who is the fellow? You are killing me! Who—who, I say, has won your heart? Who is he?"

"Who is the fellow? Why, John, he is the man who wouldn't drive Kate to her birthday picnic, and who wouldn't ask Kate to dance at Lady X——'s ball! He is the cleverest man in all England, and the most athletic—the Captain of the Southernshire Muffs, and ——"

John tore the bandage from his eyes, and lo, Catherine—in her white cap and apron—stood before him! But her teeth were like pearls, and she had eyes that danced, and her blue spectacles lay beside her on the table.

"Catherine! Kate!" he stammered.

"Oh John, forgive me!" she cried, with tears and laughter. "When you went away, I couldn't bear it, and it was Kate who came to you in spectacles and a wig, and with patches of black on her teeth, and always a piece of ivory in her mouth to alter her voice, and it is Kate who has been Catherine for three months. Oh John, I couldn't help it, and though you do think me so shallow, and though I was so angry with you, I would go to the North Pole, or journey through Sahara, with my hand in yours!"

"So this is how women love!" said John, after they were married. "I should have mourned my life away. You came and took me by storm."

"Yes, John," replied Kate. "But it was dreadfully naughty of me, and the escapade is not one that any well-behaved girl would emulate. We must be very careful that the story never gets abroad."

"Must we, my dear?"

"Yes, indeed. I couldn't bear that anyone should know it."

"Then, my dear Kate, I'm afraid I have incurred your severest displeasure."

"In what way?"

"I don't like to tell you, love. You will never forgive me!"

"Nonsense, John! Do you doubt me still? Tell me at once."

"Well then, we can't keep our story secret if we would. For I have written it out in my best hand and in the choicest language and sent it to THE ARGOSY!"

THE QUESTION.

So tall, so stout, so firm of mien,
  Such eyes for looking in between,
The great inspector stood;
  He scanned the children, then their tasks,
He looked about as one who asks,
  What better for their good?

The teachers stood in anxious plight,
  Smiling when some poor child was bright,
Trembling when such was mute.
  One thin and weird young lad was there;
His work was bad, and he did not care,
  Though under that gaze acute.

"Boy, 'tis idle and careless withal!
  When I was your age, and not so tall,
I could do the rule of three!"
  The boy said, after a little space,
And quietly raising his grave young face—
  "Please sir, was you fed like me?"

MINNIE DOUGLAS.

MR. JERMYN'S RACQUET.

By the Author of "Adonais, Q. C.," "The Conversion of Professor Nabs," &c.

IT had been an awkward meeting for both, in the long, crowded, lamp-lit drawing-room of the White Lion; but so far they had both got well through it.

It was Autumn. The waters of the broad bay lay still as glass, shimmering in the pale moonlight. From the windows of this hotel you had a fine view of the bay, away down over the tops of the other houses. The hotel stood upon an eminence, overlooking the whole watering-place. Behind it stretched a long garden, backed by a fir wood, and upon the right was a lawn and a tennis court. In the front, the steep white road coming from the watering-place led up to the very steps of the house. Its sign—if one may talk of the sign of so very fine and fashionable an hotel—was the White Lion; and it was rather a funny name, for the watering-place itself was never known by any other than Little Souris. Why Little Souris (pronounced according to the English sound of the spelling) should have become universally called so, nobody knew, for it was undeniable that its legitimate geographical name was Catchington. For an imaginative person, at any rate, who could believe the original idea to have been that this little watering-place resembled a mouse, curled cosily up between two high cliffs, and looking sleepily out upon the broad bay, it was a very pretty idea. Whether it was the pretty idea, or the quaint old picturesque houses, or the sunny soft air, or the broad blue bay, nobody could say, but year by year the popularity of Little Souris and of the White Lion grew.

These two, Mr. Jermyn and Miss Raymond, had met in the drawing-room of the hotel this evening before everyone assembled there; in the very surprise and confusion of the meeting, they had recognised each other publicly; and having once done so, had drifted into rather a constrained conversation upon general topics; each one no doubt turning over in their own mind the probabilities and improbabilities of any of the seventy or eighty people present *knowing*.

Not that there was really anything very much out of the ordinary to know. An intimacy, ripening into something more; a misunderstanding; and a separation. Three very common chapters, no doubt, in a very hackneyed type of romance. Still, one's own romance is apt to be all the world to oneself, let it be hackneyed to the rest of the world as it may; and also there are ways and ways of treating a misunderstand ng. By Mr. Jermyn's and Miss Raymond's way, it is absolutely certain that each would have stared straight past the other in a solitary

picture gallery; or would have sat silently side by side through the dreariest of entertainments—so long as they had not been startled into doing anything else. But Mr. Jermyn had, so to speak, burst upon Miss Raymond; Miss Raymond had started, flushed a faint pink, and bowed slightly; and Miss Raymond's aunt, a good humoured dowager, after first casting one astonished stare, had bowed also. To cover the embarrassment of all this, they had, as it were, been driven into a conversation.

There was to be a great tennis tournament on the morrow, and Miss Raymond, to fill up rather a lengthy pause, had just somewhat nervously enquired if Mr. Jermyn intended to play. Before he had time to answer for himself, someone else, sitting near, interrupted quickly.

"Why, Miss Raymond, is it possible that you can know Mr. Jermyn, and yet think it necessary to ask him such a question?"

She laughed more easily: it was much more comfortable that another should join in the conversation. "Then you still play as much as ever, Mr. Jermyn?"

"Rather more, I believe," he answered, slowly. "I came over from Bresswood specially for to-morrow's match."

"Did you bring your racquet with you, Jermyn?" called out a voice from the other side of the room.

"Of course," smiled Mr. Jermyn.

The last speaker came strolling forward, and laughed as he came.

"It is the most peculiar infatuation Mr. Jermyn has for that racquet of his," he said, crossing his hands upon the back of a chair near Miss Raymond, and speaking to her. "As you seem to be old acquaintances, perhaps you can throw some light upon the matter, Miss Raymond? He must have paid a small fortune in getting it re-netted and re-loaded; but buy a new one he positively will not. He solemnly assured me the other day that he would rather miss the best match in the world than play with any other."

The colour had all gone out of Miss Raymond's face now. She answered rather stiffly:

"I should think it quite possible that Mr. Jermyn would keep to his resolution."

"Yes, I shall keep to it," said he, rising lazily, and bending over a pile of music on the piano. "I think when one says a thing, one ought to stick to it; and when one plays with a racquet, one ought to stick to the racquet."

A laugh broke out all over this corner of the room; everyone was listening now to the discussion about the racquet.

"Then you really have registered a vow to that effect, Jermyn?"

"Oh—a vow!" objected he. "That is a strong expression."

"It must be something quite as solemn ——"

He laughed. "The simple fact of the matter," he explained, "is that I once happened to remark that I would never play with any

other. Now, having once said so, of course I never could play with any other—successfully. At all events I should object to try."

"This borders on the unearthly," laughed a voice in the corner.

"Is that the proper word to use?" observed another. "I think I shall ask Miss Raymond."

"Please do," said Mr. Jermyn, looking coolly round at the seat behind him.

But Miss Raymond had already left the room.

II.

She had gone straight out of the room, along a narrow passage leading into a side hall; and, opening a glass door at the end of the hall, had drawn a long deep breath of the cool night air, and stood, in her low-cut pale pink dress, looking out into the moonlit garden.

Aurora—that was her name; a most unfortunate name for a plainer woman, but the one of all others suited for her. No one could have ever cast a glance at her and doubted that she was born to do aught but shine. Her handsome, well-held figure, beautifully-moulded face, her wide, iris-blue eyes, the very fairy-like brilliance of her golden hair, each by itself seemed to proclaim the nature of the woman. There was much power, and yet something marvellously sweet in each and in all. There was something grand about her; it was impossible to look at her without feeling certain that, besides being an exceptionally beautiful, she was an exceptionally clever woman; and if there was a fault—and when is there not a fault!—one would have guessed at once, and guessed rightly, that its name was pride. Just now it seemed as if she were quivering under some blow which had fallen on her—her face looked colourless as a snow-flake in the light of the moon.

"It was my own fault for introducing the subject," she muttered, passionately; "but surely he might have spared me! When I had spoken to him, when I had agreed to let bygones be bygones, the hateful incident comes in through the means of this racquet once more. I wish I had never seen it!—I wish I had never seen Douglas Jermyn!"

She stood there, the night wind blowing about her. Then, seeming suddenly to recollect the chilliness of the evening, she shivered and shut the door again. She went along a passage to the left, and suddenly gave a great start, and stood motionless. Upon a little hall-table beside her was lying a bundle of wraps, and a strong-looking, large-sized racquet. She first stared at it, and then, seemingly in answer to an irresistible impulse, undid the strap of the wraps, and held the racquet in her hand.

"So here you are!" she muttered, half laughingly and half in anger.

Just at that moment there was a sound of feet coming along the passage, and, with a terrified start, she began to try to do up the strap again. Then, realising the hopelessness of getting it fastened in time, she went flying up the stairs, with the racquet still in her hand. The stairs were of dark polished oak, and her soft pink dress made a faint swish as it swept over them. Upon the second landing she paused and listened. The delicate colour had come into her face again with the rapid flight, and there was a glimmer of amusement in her handsome eyes as she looked down, in a half-ashamed way, at the racquet.

"Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo," rang out eight times from a clock in some hidden recess far below; and when the sound had died away, there came a faint creak and a deep silence—so deep that it was ominous. She took one step down again, hesitated for a moment just underneath a rose-coloured lamp, and then, turning once more, fled like a panic-stricken deer, and locked herself into a room not far distant. Once inside, she sank down on a chair, and, looking piteously at the racquet, burst into half-hysterical laughter. There was but a faint light in the room, and that was the moonlight. Everything was casting its long, unearthly shadow. And as she noted the long, drawn-out shadow of the racquet upon the wall, she began ruminating about the last time she had held this racquet.

The last time! yes, that was what she wanted to think about. She wanted to remember nothing about the first time. Douglas Jermyn had been playing with this racquet the first time she had met him; a bright, new, gleaming racquet it was then. It had seemed to flash in the sunshine; and she had looked at it, and she had held it. That was the first time. It was impossible to forget; but she wanted to stifle all recollection of that, and to remember only what came after. Ah! there had been so many pleasant things, that now, to-night, with the racquet in her hand, it was difficult to steel herself into remembering only the pain. But by the odd sensation she was feeling, the bitter consciousness that the wound she had thought half healed was just as open as ever, she knew she must steel herself—and so she began resolutely.

She imagined herself standing with Douglas Jermyn once more at the window of a breakfast-room. It was his birthday. He had a tiny heart-shaped, jewel-set locket open in his hand; and inside the open locket was her own miniature. It was her birthday present to him. Her cheeks burned fiercely in the pale moonlight, as she remembered all that he had said, standing there, with that miniature in his hand. The heart was to be as precious to him as his own heart; it was to bring him good fortune; and he was to treasure it all his life. She remembered every word as if he had spoken it yesterday.

Then she passed on to the following day. How, when her aunt and she were out driving, someone told them that a friend of theirs—and a friend of Mr. Jermyn's—had been unexpectedly called home to

New Zealand; and how they had driven to his chambers—for he was a barrister—to bid him good-bye. He was to have been Douglas Jermyn's best man at the wedding, and it was the least they could do.

What a hot day that was—and how well she remembered it! She was sitting in a cool corner of the room, putting in a word now and again, and laughing at her aunt's lively chatter. Then, all of a sudden, she started. There was Douglas's racquet! What kept her from exclaiming at once she could not tell; but she silently stretched out her hand for it, and held it just as she held it now. Should she ever forget the shock? Underneath the racquet, carelessly thrown down—carelessly tossed aside, no doubt—and in a friend's room—not even his own room—was the locket with her miniature. She put the racquet silently back on the top of it, cut to the quick, and went home too angry even to think—to Douglas Jermyn.

She wished now, looking back, that she had taken time to think. After all, it was but a trifle. After all, it was her own wicked pride which had been most to blame. What had Douglas Jermyn said to her? First of all—that he was sorry. That was no excuse for such carelessness. Next, and more quickly—that she must trust him. Well, there had been pride on his side too. Trust him in what way, she demanded. He turned and looked at her—she could see him now—and made no answer. Then she reproached him. She wished—ah, how she wished—she had but taken time to think. Through it all, in some way, the racquet came in again and again. It seemed to be the worst of all to her that the locket should be tossed down under so careless a thing as the racquet. Finally she remembered just how he stood and looked at her, and said at last that there was nothing ignominious in the locket having lain there; the racquet was a very good racquet. "In fact, from the day I get it into my hand again," said he, "I shall never use any other—in memoriam."

"Then I will never speak to you again," she cried, passionately.

And to think that it was possible that both had kept their word until now! Ah, dear! and she covered her eyes with her hands. Alas! this was the steeling process.

Just at this moment the handle of the door was turned, followed by a quick tattoo of knocks.

"Aurora, my dear; where are you?"

She started up, and stared wildly down at the racquet. The room was in a sort of square tower, and the window was a very broad one, down almost to the floor. Through the middle panes the moon shone, but each side was draped by a heavy curtain. She made a quick dart to the window, and poked the racquet behind the curtain; then opened the door.

"Do you want me, Aunt Janet?"

"Want you, Aurora! I wanted to see what in the world had become of you. Excuse me, my dear, but don't you think your run-

ning away like that must seem a little funny to—to Mr. Jermyn, you know. Come down."

As she spoke, she shut the door, and taking the girl's arm, pulled her gently along the passage.

"Wait a minute. What are they talking about, Aunt Janet?" she expostulated.

"Nothing of any importance," the lady answered; "only that everlasting tennis."

III.

It might have been an hour before Miss Raymond managed to get up to her room again; more it certainly was not. The conversation had turned away from tennis, but Mr. Jermyn had remained still in the same corner of the drawing-room. She passed through the same passage, and just paused for an instant in the same hall. There was no moonlight now; heavy black clouds had come rolling up, and she thought—yes, as she listened she felt sure, that it was raining. There lay the wraps. Thank heaven, no one had noticed—the strap round about them was still unfastened. Swiftly up the broad stairs again. Yes, it was just one hour ago—"Cuckoo" nine times now from the clock. Into her own room next, and straight to the window. She pushed back the curtain and started. She felt rapidly all about the dark corner;—she passed her hand swiftly down the black panes, against which the rain was pattering. *The racquet was gone.* Miss Raymond sank faintly into a chair; but after a moment's thought rose again, lighted the gas and rang for her maid.

"Who has been into my room, within the last hour?" she asked abruptly when the woman entered. The maid stared in surprise; she had been sitting only in the adjoining room.

"Nobody but myself, ma'am, she answered. "I came in to ——"

"Did you remove anything?" interrupted Aurora, quickly.

"Not I, indeed, ma'am," answered she, earnestly. "What have you lost, Miss Aurora?"

"Only—oh nothing. That will do," said Miss Raymond, rising abruptly to lower the gas.

"Poor Aurora! Once left alone again, she sank into the chair and literally wrung her hands. "How am I to go down and face him?" she moaned. "And what—*what* about the tennis match to-morrow?"

IV.

What about the tennis match indeed! What was to be done? He had said he would play with no other racquet than his own; and now his own was gone. Ah, poor Aurora! As she realised the full

horror of the situation, she first of all resolved to feign illness, and to go to bed; to go to bed, and to resolutely sleep away all to-night and to-morrow. Then making up her mind to the impossibility of that course, she formed a desperate design of confessing everything upon the spot to Mr. Jermyn, and then threw that proposition even more hastily aside than she had done the first one. And she finally swept down again to the drawing-room as if nothing had happened, to listen from afar to a heated discussion between Mr. Jermyn and someone else as to the relative merits of grass and asphalte tennis-courts. At the end of it the someone else turned a laughing appeal to her; and she answered it laughingly. Laughingly!—*and the racquet was gone.* There was nothing she could do—or at least only one thing which she ought to do—to tell Mr. Jermyn, and she shrank from that as from the plague. Oh, if the rain would but pour and pour so that there could be no match; that at least might be a respite. As the thought struck her, later on, when she was sitting in mental torture in the privacy of her own room, she pushed back the curtain of the window once more. Alas, alas, the moon was actually shining again.

It must have been the terrible anxiety of the night that made her sleep so far into the morning. The full bright sun was streaming in upon her. Nine from the cuckoo clock, and half past nine was the hour for the match! She must go down and see. Above all things—she realised it now—she must tell the truth to Mr. Jermyn. Perhaps he knew the truth already. Whoever had taken the racquet away had perhaps given it him, and told him where it was found. One sees things in such a different light in the morning. She had a cup of tea brought to her, and then went resolutely down stairs—not by the side way this time; nothing could have induced her to pass the place where the wraps lay—but down the broad, glittering, sunny grand staircase. As she came within sight of the busy hall, into the full power of the warm sunbeams, she shivered.

She was a very beautiful woman; there was no doubt of it. The hall was crowded with hurrying comers and goers, but there was hardly one who did not turn to look back at her. Just as her foot touched the lower step, a man in a tennis suit came hastily out of a side room, started and bowed.

"Good morning, Miss Raymond! I am glad to see you down in time for the match. Your aunt mentioned that you were not feeling well. By the way, have you heard about poor Jermyn?"

Her face blanched.

"Poor Jermyn!" she repeated, mechanically. At the same instant a laugh broke beside her. Yes, indeed, poor Jermyn!

He was standing close to her. She caught her lip between her teeth, and turned whiter than ever. A moment more, and a strange look flashed suddenly into the girl's expressive blue eyes. *Mr. Jermyn's right arm was in a sling.*

The man who had come out of the side room was in the act of closing a letter, and noticed nothing of Miss Raymond's confusion. He went rattling on easily.

"Most unfortunate, Jermyn! queer too, eh? Do you often have pains in your arm without knowing why? If you weren't above and beyond all the best player here, one would think you had done it on purpose."

Mr. Jermyn laughed. "You might, perhaps; I am sure Miss Raymond would never be so cruel."

"When did the shock come on?" continued the first speaker, getting out a stamp for his letter.

Mr. Jermyn passed his left hand up his right arm, feeling it carefully.

"Even last night," he said, "I felt doubtful whether I should be able to play to-day."

They had moved forward, and were standing in the doorway now. The quiet grey smoke of the little town was going silently up to the still heavens, and fairy-like white sails were dancing all about in the bay. The straight road, sloping down to the town from this, was already thickly strewed with gaily dressed people coming to witness the match, and the enclosure around the tennis ground had rapidly begun to fill. They were alone again—Mr. Jermyn and Miss Raymond. With his left arm he carelessly raised a field-glass to examine the bay.

Did he know? Aurora Raymond's heart was beating.

"Mr. Jermyn," she began, hesitatingly.

He lowered the field-glass and turned to her.

"I beg your pardon," said he, coolly.

She felt her face flush under his eyes; she paused an instant, and held out her hand for the field-glass.

"May I have a look at the bay?" she inquired, hastily.

"Certainly," said Mr. Jermyn. "I should have thought, however, that an examination of the tennis-court was more in your way. Pardon me; that is the proper focus for the bay."

Did he know? She had been screwing and unscrewing it blindly. At his last words she checked herself, and looked straight through it.

"I can see—a frigate," she said, with no other object than that of at least saying something. He crossed his arms and leaned against a pillar.

"Well," smiled he. "Now turn it on the tennis-court for a change. Perhaps you may see—a racquet."

The rich colour swept all over her face. She lowered the glass at once, her lips quivering.

"Mr. Jermyn," she began for the second time.

"Pardon me," he interrupted, quickly. "You must turn the screw in the other direction, if you really wish to focus the court."

"Mr. Jermyn," she broke out, passionately, "you *know* I don't wish to look at the tennis-court." And then as he stared down at her with an expression of intense surprise, she added, confusedly:

"I—I—you see I have never got over my old distaste to the game."

Mr. Jermyn smiled. Whether he knew it or not—it was probable that he did—his smile was exceedingly charming.

"Ah, Miss Raymond," he said, quietly, "nor over your old antipathy to tennis racquets."

Before she had time to answer him, or to recover herself, he turned swiftly away.

The day had passed on. The noise and excitement of the tennis match; the confusion of luncheon, then the match again; and now it was evening.

How had Miss Raymond got through it all? As she once more sat alone in her room, she could hardly tell. It seemed as if she were only just awaking from an uncomfortable dream. She had been too proud to absent herself entirely from the tennis court, and had laughed and chatted, admired, and been admired; and, through it all, and above it all, had been ashamed of herself and utterly miserable. She regretted now, bitterly, not having gone straight to Mr. Jermyn last night to own everything, and to explain, as well as she could explain. Then, between them, somehow or other, they might have found the racquet. How did Mr. Jermyn know that she had taken it?—she felt that he knew. She could only presume that he had seen the unfastened wraps and had inferred, as they happened to be lying on the way to her room, that she must have done so. How dare he infer such a thing? Ah, it was no use asking that, when she *had* taken it. And now, when she went to him and told him, as she must tell him, just exactly how it had happened, it would seem that the explanation, confession, whatever it was, had only been wrung from her, under the fear of his confiding to others what he knew himself. Was he likely to submit to the loss of the racquet without a word? He had let her see how much he knew for her own sake, hoping, no doubt, that it would draw her into returning it before he openly asked for it back again or applied to others.

He had been at the match, too; his black sling, and grey clothes, stood out amongst the flannel suits; but he had never once come near her. At luncheon he had studiously avoided looking at her, as ndeed she had avoided looking at him; and when by inadvertence both their eyes had happened to meet, he had looked away even more hastily than she had. An evening in the drawing-room —at least until she had seen him to explain—she felt she could not stand, so she had really pleaded illness this time, and here she was. Oh, Mr. Jermyn—Mr. Jermyn—and she was not quite sure—or

rather—yes, she might as well own it to herself, she still loved him passionately, as she could never love again.

She began to shiver; how changeable the weather was. Think of this long, bright beautiful day ending in rain! Yes, heavy rain. She listened to it, as she had listened last night. Only a shower, but a heavy one. She listened silently to the pattering, until it became fainter and fainter, and at last ceased. Then all at once there shone out the moon. She rose with a sigh, and pulled back the side curtains. Why, no wonder she had been cold! The side window was open.

She looked far out of the window, away into the shadowy garden. The rain upon the grass, and the many-tinted trees glistened in the moonlight; and suddenly, as she looked, a thought seemed to strike her, for she threw up the window even wider than before, and hastily thrusting her head out, strained her eyes down into the bushes.

There was a whole bed of thick shrubbery just underneath. She stared and peered into it for a minute, and then drew in her head once more, and stood to think. She recollected something now, and rang the bell hastily, just as she had done last night. There was the sound of her maid rising in the next room, and after an instant the door opened. Miss Raymond had already drawn the curtains and lit the gas.

"Martin," she said to the woman, "I wish you would shut this window. It is rather difficult. I suppose you closed it last night."

The maid went over and drew it down with some difficulty.

"It *is* stiff, Miss Aurora. Yes; it was to close it that I came in yesterday evening, after you had gone down the first time. Have you found what you lost, ma'am?"

"I—I—believe so," said Aurora, staring blankly before her. "Thanks; that will do."

She believed so! After the woman left her, she started up, and slipped on a long, dark cloak: then hesitated, just for one moment, to consider.

The window was open when she had thrust the racquet so hastily behind the curtains at the sound of her aunt's voice last night. The window was open and reached almost to the floor. She had half thrust, half flung the racquet, never even casting a glance behind the curtain. Why, the inference was clear enough. *She must have flung it outside.* Yes, there could be no doubt of it.

They were all in the drawing-room; it would be easy enough for her to slip out into the garden unobserved just now; but if they had all been in the passage and she had had to go straight through them, she would still have done it. She must satisfy herself instantly. But only to think of the racquet lying out in the damp and rain since last night! Mr. Jermyn's racquet.

She let herself out through the same glass door at which she had stood looking into the garden yesterday. She went rapidly along a gravel path, over a plot of dripping grass, and now here was the shrubbery. She had on thin shoes, but she plunged in amongst the soft earth, and fought her way through the laurels and bays and hollies —until at last she stood beneath her own window. Yes, it was just as she thought. Alas! there lay the racquet.

She took it up, tears of vexation glistening in her eyes. Ah, it was quite spoilt; of course she might have expected that. The netting loosened, the head twisted, the plaiting on the handle hanging in long strips. Hopelessly, irredeemably spoilt. She turned it over and over, heedless of the damp mould encasing her feet. The very wood had worn into a hole underneath where the plaiting had been. Alas for poor Mr. Jermyn's racquet!

Stay—this was not a hole. No, no. What was this? A little round bit of tin about the size of a half-crown. She stared at it, and pushed it down at one side, and found that it turned back as if upon a hinge. The next instant her face had grown whiter than the white house beside which she was standing. *The locket that she had given him, the locket with her own miniature, was lying before her eyes!*

She took out the locket from its bed, and stared before her blankly. In one moment she understood—she saw it all. The only thing was, how had she been so blind as not to see it from the first. The man, in whose rooms she had discovered the locket and the racquet that fatal afternoon, was well known amongst them as being a mechanical genius. He was always making things, and contriving things, and inventing things. Of course she knew that; how had she not thought of it? He was to have been Douglas Jermyn's best man; of course Douglas had entrusted him with the locket that he might do this with it. And very likely, most possibly, the racquet and locket had been thrust hastily aside where she had seen them, at the announcement of her entry. It was an odd, fanciful idea of Mr. Jermyn's—of Douglas's. She could not help smiling at it in the midst of her distress—but then Douglas had always been so fanciful.

She pushed her way slowly and dazedly out of the bushes again, the locket still in her hand. She went in at the same door, along past the wraps. They were still there, but to-night she never even noticed them, and at the foot of the stairs paused, and drew a deep breath of positive horror. Oh, were things always to turn against her! What fate, or chance, had ordered that Mr. Jermyn should be coming down those stairs?

Whatever it had been, he *was* coming down them. In point of fact he had gone up by this quiet way for a pipe he had left in the smoking-room. He was in evening dress, but looked in no wise surprised to see the beautiful Miss Raymond, dishevelled and dripping, coming in at this hour from the garden. He drew aside politely to let her pass—just underneath the rose-coloured lamp. Whether it was the

coldness of the action or that the soft rays reminded her of how she had stood here last night, she stopped abruptly, and bringing the racquet from underneath her cloak, handed it to him.

"Mr. Jermyn," she said, bitterly, "look at your racquet."

He took it from her without the faintest start, and examined the head of it with great composure.

"I would not have believed," said he, pleasantly, "that a strong racquet like mine could become so ridiculously twisted with a couple of showers of rain. But of course, you know, Miss Raymond, there was the damp ground as well. Pardon me—I hope you changed your shoes before venturing into the shrubbery."

She stared at him in a stupefied way for a couple of seconds, and then burst out angrily,

"If you knew, Mr. Jermyn, why did you not tell me?"

"Tell you," repeated Mr. Jermyn, amazedly; and then broke into a short laugh, which he instantly suppressed. "After you left the drawing-room yesterday evening, by the merest chance in the world I happened to look out of the open drawing-room window. I did so just in time to see my own racquet precipitated from another window —from the tower window. Now, as you had mentioned to me not a quarter of an hour before, that your rooms were in that tower I—I—hardly thought it necessary to remind you of the incident about the racquet. Believe me, it should have lain undisturbed there, so far as I was concerned, until the end of the world, or until the gardener brought it once more to light. I am sorry if you have wet your feet."

She stared at him, and leaned back against the banister.

"If you saw it falling, why did you not go out for it? Why did you leave it there in the rain?" she asked, piteously.

"Because," said Mr. Jermyn, politely, but making a movement as if he would pass, "I had far too great a respect for the wishes of Miss Raymond. Excuse me—they are waiting for me in the drawing-room."

"Mr. Jermyn," she interrupted, quickly, and standing before him, "you—you must let me tell you. You must let me explain—as well as I can explain——Ah!" she broke off, covering her eyes suddenly, "I wonder what you do think of me?"

He stared down at her; the deep silence always dominant in this part of the house was unbroken, save for the faint ticking of a clock. After an instant's pause, he answered her in a totally different voice:

"Upon my word, I don't know. Surely it was a—well—shall I say a *foolish* thing to do? Upon my word, I don't know what I think of you—Aurora."

At the sound of her own name she started; and then tightened her hold on the banister.

"I would have told you yesterday," she began, feverishly; "but I seemed not to be able to find words.—And you would not give me time. I took the racquet, Mr. Jermyn, simply because an irresistible

desire came over me to hold it, and to look at it. Then, when I heard my aunt's voice, I pushed it hastily behind the curtains, and when I came up an hour afterwards, and found it gone, and knew not how it had gone or who had taken it, I cannot tell you what I felt. This is the real truth. It is only a few minutes ago that, seeing my window open, it suddenly occurred to me about the garden."

He stared at her, and stared at the racquet in her hand; then all at once started and looked up at her again.

"You have found it out?" he said, quickly. "You know then—at last."

"Yes, I have found it out," she answered, opening her hand and showing the locket. "I understand all—I am so sorry!—I have regretted it bitterly."

"I have been sorry ever since," said Mr. Jermyn, abruptly and huskily. "It was all, every bit of it, my own fault."

"No, no," she interrupted, with vehemence. "It was all mine."

She made a rapid movement to get up the staircase, but he barred the way this time.

"Aurora," he said, "listen: it was both our faults; or it was nobody's fault—not even the racquet's. It was all a mistake.—Oh, Aurora! Let us begin it all over again."

"Cuckoo—cuckoo!"—ten lusty times. It seemed almost as if there was a ring of amusement in the little bird's voice; but neither Miss Raymond nor Mr. Jermyn noticed it.

Five minutes later Miss Raymond went up the staircase uninterruptedly, but looking strangely beautiful, even for her; and Mr. Jermyn passed into the drawing-room with a radiant face, and the racquet in his hand—to tell such story as seemed good to him.

ONE FIRST OF APRIL.

"Queen Rose is cold and stately,"
I told her so but lately,
When she and I picked violets in the lane.
She held her head sedately,
Nor spoke to me again.

"Queen Rose is proud and cruel."
This woke a wordy duel,
"You need not seek for violets by this path,
If all I say is fuel
To feed your manly wrath!"

"Queen Rose is black as thunder;
So let us walk asunder;
You there, I here, the violets left with you,
Look over leaves and under—
I'm seeking something too!"

"Queen Rose in silence curious,"
Affects an interest spurious,
For full five minutes in her own hedgeline;
At last, her pique grown furious,
She needs must cross to mine.

"What is it you are seeking?"
(I scan my hedge, not speaking)
"It is too early yet for buds of May;
See where the shoots are breaking,
Because it's warm to-day!"

I beat my bush together,
Investigate a feather,
Turn back a leaf, then answer her: "Who knows?
In such unusual weather
Perhaps I'll find a rose!"

"A Rose! you foolish fellow!
Pink rose, or white, or yellow?
Can you expect they bloom for April's sun?
Why, June but makes them mellow,
And April's scarce begun!"

"Queen Rose, so grand and clever,
What, have they told you never
The trick that marks young April's opening day?
My April Rose, however,
Blooms your side of the way!"

Queen Rose, with all her splendour,
Proves but a poor pretender;
Turns half aside, one moment gives no sign;
Then blushes, smiles, grows tender—
And puts her hand in mine!

G. B. Stuart.

M. ELLEN STAPLES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"IT WAS A HAMPER WE FOUND OUT OF DOORS," PUT IN LETTY.

THE ARGOSY.

MAY, 1885.

THE MYSTERY OF ALLAN GRALE.

CHAPTER XVI.

BELL MATTHEWSON AGAIN.

IT was a miserable hour for that elderly couple, Mr. and Mrs. Grale, as they sat together in the privacy of their chamber in the still night: he striving to pass off his emotional sorrow with a display of indignation—which he really felt; she giving way helplessly to the bitterest feelings of suspense and terror. Their only son, loved well by both of them, had disappeared from home, the evening of the day before, Tuesday the twentieth of October.

Mr. Grale raised his face in a few minutes; but it did not seem the broad, fresh, arrogant old face his wife knew so well. It was harsh as ever, but it was pinched and scared. She was but a foolish woman, she knew, apt to give way to foolish fears and fancies; but to see this look on his face terrified her worse than all, for it told her that her undefined fears were real.

"Oh what is this?" cried the bewildered woman. "Dick, husband, what is it? What has happened to our boy? Where is he?"

Mr. Grale turned impatiently aside. He said some words which seemed to blanch her very heart, though they failed to convey any definite idea to her mind. "Nothing has happened to him that I know of," he went on. "He is safe enough, I expect. No fear but we shall hear of him before we want to."

"O Richard," she cried, "you were not always stern and hard. You are angry now and that makes you so. Won't you tell me all about it? I am sure you know something. Wherever he is and whatever he has done, he is my boy still, and I can't forget that."

Mr. Grale looked at her, as she sat beside him swaying to and fro helplessly, a forlorn picture which bore no resemblance to the buxom, easy-going dame whom he was wont to overawe. There came a great pity into his eyes.

"He's my boy too," he said, "and I'm ashamed of him, and that's why I'd not tell you what I ought to tell. If he is ever to come back at all, the least said now will be the soonest mended then."

"Oh, Richard, won't you have pity on me? I'm sure you know something; what is it?"

"I know that he has gone off—decamped—without saying anything to you or to me, Mary. And I think you may feel pretty sure that some disgraceful matter or other, which he could not stay at home to face, has sent him. Debt, to begin with, I'll lay."

Mrs. Grale tried to reflect. She did not much think so. She felt sure that Alny all day yesterday, when she last saw him, had no more intention of decamping than she had. But—it might be that some liability had come suddenly pressing upon him unawares, and that he had gone away for a day or two to gain time. Perhaps her husband knew of this?

"Was it in that way, Richard?" she said, speaking out her thoughts. "It might have seemed to him, poor fellow, the best thing to be done—to go out of the worry for just a day or two. The more fuss there is made when anything goes wrong, the harder it is to get it to come right."

Mr. Grale caught at her words: he hated a scene and wanted it ended. "Yes, yes, we know Alny's all right," he said impatiently. "Let people think, if they ask about him, that he is gone away on a matter of business."

"But *is* he all right?" she cried again, the old frantic feeling of doubt and of loss overtaking her. "Why need he have gone away without speaking to me? without one single word!"

"It is to his credit that he did so," said Mr. Grale, rising to his feet, and putting her hand from him, "if he knew that he was in any disgraceful predicament. Why should he have stayed here to work upon your feelings, got you to take his part, and make discord between us? Fathers and mothers are different, Polly. Mothers seem to be satisfied to have their children with them whatever they may be—or do. Fathers would rather never see them again, unless they can be proud of them."

If Mrs. Grale had been in a fit state to observe, she might have noticed that he ground his heel into the carpet as he spoke.

Whether Mr. Grale had cause to suspect his son of ill-doing, or whether he only feared he had, he was feeling deeply. His wife had taken the last words as a reproach to her own weakness and wanted to defend herself.

"It is not the going away that's trying me," she said. "I wanted you to let Alny go into the army, you know, Richard, and he'd have always been away then. But that would have been different. It's the going without a word: as if he didn't feel there was a creature who cared for him, or whether he went or stayed."

"You will soon be hearing from him," remarked Mr. Grale.

"Do you think so?"

"Think so!—why of course you will. He will write to *you*. He'd better not write to me," said the angry man.

"And I am to say to people that he is away on business? and keep up a light face over it! I don't much like that."

"Then say nothing to them," said Mr. Grale, with something of his usual snappishness.

"I don't like to tell untruths about it," she wailed. "Or it might be a fit judgment on me to find Alny was in his grave, while I, not knowing where he was, had been giving out that all was well with him!"

"No fear of Alny's being in his grave," lightly retorted Mr Grale. "Young men are not so eager to go there."

"For all we know, some accident may have happened to him, Richard."

"No fear. We should pretty soon have heard of *that*."

"I'm sure I shall never have the face to tell people what you suggest."

"You will if you keep cool."

"I can't keep cool," said poor Mrs. Grale. "If there's anything wrong I always show it. My face is as my heart."

"Look here, Mary," said he, rather savagely—"what there is wrong with Allan, do you want to make worse, that you should open your mouth about it to your visitors? Just say to them, if they ask, that he is away on business; if they don't ask, say nothing."

"I'm such a bad one to pretend things," said the poor lady.

"Then keep out of sight awhile and let Mary Anne take the front," retorted Mr. Grale. "She is shrewd and canny; not likely to be thrown off her guard by anybody's curiosity." His face relaxed to a grim smile. He was rather proud of some traits in his daughter's character. He could understand her descent from himself. "It's a pity she wasn't the boy of the family," he went on. "It doesn't much matter, either way, what girls are. But what's the good of a man's being successful, if the son who is to come after him is a fool or——worse! Half a man's prosperity is in what his children are: maybe it's the best half too!"

"But some folks get neither half," said Mrs. Grale, dreamily. "Look at my poor sister, Marget, and her husband!"

Mr. Grale answered nothing for a few minutes. Then he spoke.

"Have you looked over Allan's room yet?"

"No," she answered with a start. "I made sure he'd be back to-night—I wouldn't let myself be frightened till just as I met you. And yet I did seem to know that something was coming! I felt it was, all day yesterday!"

Mr. Grale paid no heed to fancies. He turned away to go to Allan's chamber. Mrs. Grale followed.

"I locked the door," she said, producing the key. He walked with

his head erect and his usual heavy tread, but she crept after him with timid, stealthy steps. She could scarcely resist a wild hope—she knew it was utterly wild—that they might find Allan seeking admittance to his chamber. But no. Her husband unlocked the door. They went in: all was silent. Dark too, save for the candle which Mr. Grale carried in his hand, and which seemed about to be suddenly quenched. It was by the night breeze blowing in through the open window. It blew the curtain too, so that it slapped dully against the wall. Mr. Grale's first action was to close this window.

Then he looked round, saw Edgar Vivian's note, and took it up. He paid more heed to it than his wife had done.

"No date!" he said: "a bad, unbusiness-like habit! I wonder when that note was left, and if that arrangement for meeting at the Black Pool was ever kept?"

Mrs. Grale shook her head. She knew nothing about it. Her husband put the note carefully into his pocket.

As for the rest of the room, one or two of the drawers stood slightly open, and from a key in one, hung a key ring, holding the keys of the others.

"There's nothing here, you see, Polly," he remarked cheerily. "I'll just look after things a little, while you go downstairs and pour out some wine for us both. We are too old to stand this sort of worry without some support."

He lit one of the candles on Allan's toilet table and handed Mrs. Grale that which he had carried from their own bedroom. She went off with it through the darkness of the staircase into the great dreary dining room, over whose expanse it cast little more light than a star on a wintry sky. Enough, however, to show her her own white face in one of the mirrors, and she put the candle where it would not do this —the stealthily moving reflection made her feel so eerie.

As she went to the sideboard for a decanter, she caught sight of the little silver salver with something upon it. A letter. It was that letter, with the Southampton post mark and the monogram on the seal, which Mary Anne had refrained from taking to her mother earlier in the evening.

Mrs. Grale caught it up in a flutter. Its direction was not in Allan's writing, and everything, except her boy, had just now vanished from her thoughts and her memory. But it was somebody's letter, and might have news of the runaway, so she tore it open, and read it with bewildered eyes.

A photograph dropped from it. Not till Mrs. Grale had reached the signature, did she fully recal her recent rencontre with her girlhood's friend and neighbour, Bell Matthewson. The letter was short.

"SOUTHAMPTON,
"On board the *Southern Cross*.

"MY DEAR MARY,—The other day, I could not express how much I felt at seeing you again after so many years! Old ties bind strongly,

do they not—through distance and change and silence! Perhaps we may not be so silent in future. But there is often little time for correspondence when there is much for memory and affection. Will you let the enclosed photograph stand in some shady corner, to keep me in remembrance for the sake of 'Auld Lang-syne.' I have written on its back an Australian address, which will always find me wherever I may be in that country. I shall always know where to find you. If either of us can ever do the other a service, I am sure we will. It seems a wild chance, but a proverb of my Danish forefathers says: 'The paths to a true friend lie direct—even across the world!'

"Ever your affectionate friend, "BELL MATTHEWSON."

The kindly words brought the tears to poor Mrs. Grale's eyes. As through their mist she peered at the photograph, the comely, peaceful face of the middle-aged lady seemed transformed into the startled child-face, lit up by the burning byre and then into the wistful countenance of the snooded lassie, who had stood beside her years before, when she and Marget had heard they were fatherless. What she had said to Mary Anne flashed on her memory. She dropped back into a chair.

"It's Bell Matthewson again!" she cried: "and this is the trouble!"

Her husband found her sitting so when he came downstairs. As for him, he had regained most of his ordinary manner. That recalled his wife to the commonplace realities of life.

"Has he taken any of his things?" she asked forlornly.

"He seems to have taken all his money, for I can find none," said Mr. Grale, "and I do not see his little travelling letter case. One or two of his drawers look rather empty; but perhaps not more so than usual."

"I've really lost count of his things," said Mrs. Grale. "There's been nothing but coming and going, and losing and changing, so that the lists I made are scarcely any use at all."

CHAPTER XVII.

TAKING TEA AT DR. PALMER'S.

MARY ANNE GRALE slept calmly through that night and came downstairs next morning in a state of mind as serene as usual. It was not only that she had a selfish heart, but as yet she lay under no particular apprehension about her brother. She believed that Allan might return in some sort of disgrace, with no worse results than an unpleasantness with his father; but her fancy did not stray to any tragic ending.

Her first sense of some real disaster—her first consciousness of possible danger—was aroused when she found that her own view was

to be seriously adopted as the key of the situation, by which her parents were resolved to abide, and by which the household was to steer its course. "Mr. Allan had gone away on a little matter of business."

Mary Anne was not deceived into thinking that her parents believed this, or that her mother was content. It was Mr. Grale's will, and that was to be enough. She had never before seen her mother so rebel against that will. Mrs. Grale kept her room, and cried and slept, and awoke and cried, and ate scarcely anything. And what was a still more striking novelty, Mr. Grale bore all this quietly and patiently, showing no temper; and he sat beside his wife in the evening, reading to her from the newspapers.

The servants heard what they were told—to wit, that Mr. Allan had been called from home, and the time of his return to it was uncertain, depending upon the business he had gone to transact. But Mary Anne felt that they knew well enough all was not right. James at least knew how she and her mother had fully believed Allan to be in his room the morning after their visit to Lady Laura Bond, and it was hardly likely James had not spoken. Miss Grale had a very just estimate of servants' knowledge of all which goes on under a master's roof. She thought probably they knew more than she or her mother.

Mary Anne's private theory was, that something had gone wrong between her father and brother on that memorable evening of the visit to Lady Laura. After that hasty and preoccupied meal of Allan's, of which James had spoken, he might have returned to the Works and gone through some bitter quarrel with his father—and Allan, passionate and hasty, might have chosen to leave home for a time. Or the quarrel might have taken place earlier in the day.

She felt that a few well-aimed questions might bring out much, but that these questions must not be asked. Mary Anne hated family scandal; hated it, perhaps, more than family sin. She could have more easily forgiven Allan for something worse, than for going away after this fashion, which left them in so queer a predicament, and she wished he was back again.

Of course the neighbours would be told what they were to be told. But to Mr. George Vivian she might be a little more open, and confide to him that she suspected there had been a quarrel between father and son. It would be delightful to share a secret with George Vivian.

It was a few days after Allan had vanished. Mrs. Grale sat in her small sitting-room upstairs, weeping and bemoaning herself; for the time was going on, and still they did not hear from the truant. Mr. Grale and his daughter were taking lunch together in the dining-room. Mrs. Grale rarely came down to take it with them now."

"Mary Anne," said Mr. Grale, speaking suddenly, "when did you last call upon the Palmers?"

"I'm sure I don't remember, papa," she answered superciliously, for Miss Mary Anne Grale rather despised the Palmers. "I do not go there often."

"I don't see why you shouldn't," retorted her father. "The girls are nice girls, and the doctor is a man I respect: a little hot, but a man I respect."

"I thought you and he had quarrelled over young Carr," observed Mary Anne. Something of the story had reached Moorland House. Not through either father or son: they had not spoken of it indoors. Some version of it had got about in the neighbourhood, and Mary Anne had heard of it from her maid.

"What! you know about that, do you?" said the manufacturer angrily. "Well, suppose we did? Quarrels don't last for ever. And the last thing we elders need to quarrel over is you young people, for I'm sure we can't make ourselves answerable for any of you."

"I'll call on the Palmers, if you wish, papa," said Mary Anne amiably.

"Yes, do; you might go to-day. Give Dr. Palmer my compliments, and tell him I'd be glad if he'd look me up at the Mill when he has leisure. Say I would call on him, only I might do so twenty times without finding him at home. And ——" Mr. Grale hesitated.

"What other message?" asked Mary Anne.

"Nothing," said her father shortly. Then added: "Well—if he should happen—to make any allusion to—a difference between us—well, you may say I was speaking about it with regret and am inclined to look at things in a more favourable light, now that I've had a little time for consideration. But I hardly know,—perhaps I had better tell him this myself."

"Very well, papa, I will call," said Mary Anne. She began to think of her visit with some pleasure. Moorland House was certainly very dull: George Vivian seemed in no hurry to pay it the hoped-for visit.

Miss Grale unconsciously timed her call opportunely. When she reached Dr. Palmer's, late in the afternoon, and enquired if the young ladies were at home and disengaged, the unconventional little parlour-maid dropped a curtsey as she answered in the affirmative.

"Yes, miss, quite disengaged. At least, there's only Mr. Vivian calling."

But Mary Anne felt a twinge of disappointment, when on being ushered into the drawing-room, she found that in this instance "Mr. Vivian" meant Edgar and not George.

Still, he was George's brother, and that was something; and she devoted more of her first attentions to him than was courteous to her young hostesses. Perhaps they did not notice it much: few are deeply hurt by the neglect of those for whom they have little regard.

Mary Anne was assiduous in her enquiries after all at the Court. It was so delightful to think "that, despite dark prophecies, the dear General was really doing well."

"Yes, our alarm for him is over for the present," said Edgar. He seemed strangely uneasy under Mary Anne's cordialities. He had risen to go, before she could take the seat which Agnes had placed for her, and Mary Anne only detained him by remaining standing herself.

"I fear you have all worn yourselves out with your anxiety and your watching," she remarked. "How is your brother? Mamma was quite concerned about him the other evening—when we picked him up as we were driving home from Lady Laura Bond's, you know."

Edgar seemed to remember with an effort. "Oh yes," he said, "George was tired: he is pretty well, though. Of course, our anxiety has told on us all."

"Your sister has not seemed very strong for some time," observed Letty Palmer to Edgar. "Papa was saying he thought she wanted a change."

"Is Maria ill?" exclaimed Mary Anne, with real interest. She had known something of the old love passages between her brother and Miss Vivian. Was it possible that some light on Allan's absence was to come from this quarter?—had love for Maria sent him away?

"She is not ill; only a little overworn," replied Edgar. "As the rest of us are, Miss Grale."

"Mamma is not quite herself, either," said Mary Anne. "She never is when Allan is away. It is a fashion with mothers," she added, with a slight laugh.

"When did your brother go?" asked Edgar, turning to her sharply. His voice sounded harsh from its abruptness. Mary Anne did not know that he was yet aware of Allan's absence. Apparently the Palmers were not.

Lettice exclaimed in innocent surprise, "What! is Mr. Allan off travelling again! I thought when he came back from Scotland he had settled down for the winter?"

"So did we," said Mary Anne, laughing, "but he started off suddenly some days ago. It is business this time—and we don't mean to expect him back until we see him." Her laugh had constraint in it. She could not help fancying that they all must scent the family quarrel, which (as she herself believed) must have driven him. Could she only have known it, Letty and Agnes were perfectly unsuspicious, and Edgar Vivian had quite other thoughts of his own.

"I really must go," he said, moving about as he made his adieux.

"We did not think this was to be so short a visit," observed Letty; "we see you so seldom, Mr. Edgar. I hoped you would stay to tea, and then you would have seen papa."

She glanced towards her sister as she spoke, thinking that if Agnes backed up the invitation, it had the better chance of being accepted. But Agnes kept silence persistently. Edgar murmured something about "another time" and departed, seeming rather impatient to go.

"I hope I did not frighten Edgar Vivian away," said Mary Anne. "I thought it looked like it."

"O dear no," answered Agnes, with her crisp energy.

Mary Anne settled herself on the sofa, prepared to make herself agreeable in her own condescending fashion. "What is the new pretty thing for me to admire?" she asked, looking around; for the Palmer girls generally had pretty articles about them.

Letty and Agnes had a specialty for dainty arts and devices, and the doctor's drawing-room had quite a character of its own. The pictures might not be of much value, but they carried the memories and associations of lives with them. There were groups of photographs, and sketches of familiar and far-off scenes; wreaths of pressed flowers encircling a kindly message; Oriental toys and boxes of West Indian shells; fossils from the South Sea Islands, and the curious feathers from the lyre bird.

"Agnes is still busy upon her last masterpiece," said Letty, laughing; and then Mary Anne rose and crossed the room to examine it.

"It looks charming," she said. "What is it for?"

"It" was a square basket. Agnes had lined it with a loose bag of Turkey red. She had swathed it in a strip of blue-green serge, embroidered in sun-flowers, and she was now trimming its edge with a fringe of blue, green and yellow wool tassels, stiffened into coquettish shape by a judicious mixture of twine.

"It is for a drawing-room waste-paper basket," answered Agnes. "When papa sits here late of an evening, he is apt to make a litter of the notes and circulars he gets, and the periodicals that are of no more use. But all are not to be thrown away, only some of them, and the servant gets perplexed. So she is to put everything she finds lying about in this basket. See, it has a lid to it. Don't you think it a good idea?"

"Very good indeed," assented Mary Anne.

"It was a hamper we found out of doors," put in Letty. "Quite a new one, it looked. I tell Agnes that if the real owner of that basket turns up, he will carry it off and all her work too, as the lawful improvement of his property!"

"I can easily rip off the work," laughed Agnes. "It is not a fixture."

"Somebody must have owned the basket," returned Letty. "I found it—the only thing I ever did find. It had a letter on its lid, a great 'G?'"

"An empty hamper—with the letter 'G' upon its lid!" mused Mary Anne, with a curious sensation which most of us know, as if she had lived through this trivial little scene before, either in a dream or in reality.

Lettice went on to tell of where they had found it—hidden among the ferns on the hill road, not very far from the Court—while Mary Anne Grale had taken the lid into her hands. The shifting phantasies of her brain had resolved themselves into a distinct memory of her

mother's chiding Allan for losing just such a hamper as this—one of a new kind.

"Do you know," she said, looking up—and there might have been noted a strange little quiver about her mouth, "do you know—I believe this is a hamper of ours."

Both the girls looked full of contrition. Mary Anne laughed.

"You are quite welcome to it, I am sure," she said gracefully; "more than welcome. Mamma will be proud to think how one of her hampers has been honoured; you must not forget to show it to her the first time she calls."

"Oh, thank you; we'll not forget that. You say she is poorly?"

"Very poorly," answered Mary Anne; "but I hope she will soon be better."

"I hope so, too. It is very hard of us to have appropriated her hamper."

"Very," gravely replied Mary Anne. "I remember mamma's asking Allan what he had done with the hamper—he had taken some plants to old Nurse Kate's in it; and I don't believe he knew what he had done with it, though he told mamma in answer that he would find it. He must just have thrown it away to save himself the trouble of bringing it home."

"Of course he had," said Letty, laughing.

"And I suppose, what with papa's coming home unexpectedly after his absence, and then Allan's going away unexpectedly, it went out of mamma's mind, for I have not heard her speak of it since," concluded Mary Anne.

"That is papa's step," said Letty, "and tea is sure to be ready in the dining-room."

Perhaps there was a little constraint in the doctor's greeting to his rich neighbour's daughter. Mary Anne Grale was no favourite of his, as was Maria Vivian. He could not help contrasting the two in his mind. Maria was like a wild white rose, perhaps after suns have been a little too scorching, or storms a little too heavy. Mary Anne was prim and perky—as a gum-flower! Yet what his welcome lacked in cordiality, it made up in ceremony. The doctor always showed an overwhelming civility towards those for whom he could not trust his kindlier feelings.

"And how are all at Moorland House?" he asked.

"Mamma is not very well," answered Mary Anne. "Nothing serious—nothing to call for your aid, Doctor. She is never quite happy when Allan is away; she would like to have him by her side always, tied to her apron string."

"What! is he away!" exclaimed the doctor with genuine surprise. "Where is he off to now?"

Mary Anne was rather taken aback, for she had thought that Dr. Palmer, being about so much, must have heard of Allan's absence. But she retained her presence of mind.

"He has been gone a few days now," she said carelessly, "and we have not yet had a letter from him. I expect one will come soon."

Dr. Palmer looked up with a sudden, frank interest.

"He did not go off in the night, did he?" he asked.

Mary Anne's face flushed deeply. She was not prepared for this curious question.

"I really don't know how he went," she answered. "I and mamma were out at the moment of his leaving. But it could not have been at night—there is no night train from Dering," she concluded more decidedly.

"One might get away riding, or on foot," said the doctor. The expression of his face had changed. His long professional training had made him swift to detect when something was being kept back; and he thought that now. Mary Anne felt uneasy; she wished the subject had not been brought forward. If the doctor did not know of Allan's absence, he seemed to know, or at least to suspect, something concerning his departure. Presently he took out his visiting-book, looked carefully back over one or two pages, and made a cross in the margin of a certain entry.

Mary Anne had her father's messages to deliver. She began to lead up to it.

"Where is Charles Carr?" she asked jauntily.

"He is out just now," replied Dr. Palmer.

"Papa sent you his compliments, Dr. Palmer," Mary Anne went on. "He bade me say he had not had the pleasure of seeing you for the last few days."

"Indeed? Mr. Grale seldom does me the honour of a call," observed the doctor stiffly.

"He wants to see you very much now, I think," pursued Miss Grale. "He said to me that he never knows when to catch you at home, but that his own hours at the counting-house are regular, and he will be glad to see you there at the earliest opportunity you can make it convenient to go. I fancy he has some special matter to speak about," she added, with a slight hesitation, even her self-complacency shivering slightly in the increasing chill of the genial doctor's manner.

"I believe we completely settled everything between us at our last interview," he returned.

"Papa does not think so," answered Mary Anne; "he told me to say so. He told me to say he had been giving the matter—you would understand, he said—a very full consideration, and that he was now inclined to take a more lenient view of things."

"There is no lenient view to be taken at all," said Dr. Palmer, with an emphasis on the adjective, for he had been feeling bitter against Mr. Grale for his unforgiving harshness to Charles. His face was rigid and impassable enough, but in reality many new thoughts were entering his mind and adjusting themselves among old facts.

"He says he really thinks he must be persuaded to recal his decision and extend another chance to Charles Carr," continued Mary Anne, improving upon her father's message. Which she had no right to do.

"I am glad that he feels so, for his own sake," said Dr. Palmer. "But the decision does not rest with him now, Miss Grale. You must tell him from me, if you please, that the other parties concerned see no reason to alter theirs. Though I am sure they will be glad to hear his message," he added, softening a little, for it was not in Dr. Palmer's nature to turn away from even a little kindness. "I am sure of that; I can answer for that," he went on, for Mary Anne did not speak; "they will only regret he did not see his way to send it before. But everything is settled now, and there is to be no going back. You will repeat this to your father, Miss Grale—and give my compliments. Say everything is settled now, and there is to be no going back."

Mary Anne Grale went home in an unsatisfactory and restless state of mind. Nothing had happened well. Edgar Vivian had been cool, and seemed anxious to get away from her. Dr. Palmer certainly seemed to know something which had prompted him to ask that curious question as to the hour of Allan's departure, and whether he went at night; and he appeared to intimate that he might have gone on foot. Then the hiding of that basket was odd—and Letty had said it looked to have been hidden on purpose. What did it all mean?

"Has Allan fallen into any kind of trouble here, or formed some undesirable associations, so that he had to escape for a time?" thought she. "If it be so, that must have caused the final quarrel between him and papa."

Miss Grale deemed herself fully justified in assuming that such a quarrel had taken place. But in that she was perhaps mistaken.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LETTER FROM SAVOCH.

The week, following Allan Grale's mysterious departure, ended, and another wore away; and the third was well advanced when there came a letter to Moorland House for Mrs. Grale. This was not a very common occurrence, except in the matter of bills, circulars and invitations. Mrs. Grale had lost sight of most of her early friends: few of whom had made, like herself and Bell Matthewson, any great advance in the social position of life.

Mary Anne looked at this letter, as she dutifully took it up to her mother. She knew where it came from, as readily as she had guessed concerning Miss Matthewson's missive. And if it had been possible, she would have liked to suppress this one altogether.

She hated the very look of it—the weak caligraphy, painfully

scratched in thin ink on the mean envelope, with its great dab of sealing wax, bearing some out-of-date device of hearts and darts. She hated the very sight of its post-mark of "Savoch." What sort of a place was Savoch, she wondered, and had any good ever come out of it for anybody? Mary Anne despised her Uncle and Aunt Gibson, and the mean way in which their poverty compelled them to live.

At the best of times, a letter from her sister Marget depressed Mrs. Grale. It was well that they came so seldom. She was always tearful for days afterwards—thinking of old times, when she and Marget had been such happy girls together, pitying Marget for the hard life she must lead, and then pitying herself for the little which her own wealth and luxury seemed able to do for her. Mary Anne had seen her mother's eyes fill with tears at a garden party, and had known that the inspiring cause was some reflection that a solitary glimpse into such gaiety would make a gala for poor Marget! When Mrs. Grale felt stiff in her fine dresses, or did not relish her professed cook's made dishes, she knew the discomfort came from the fact that she could not share her luxuries with poor Marget. It was a sentimental fallacy, which might reveal the deepest depths of her nature; yet, in reality, Marget and Polly Burn had not been specially loving sisters, had had many a rivalry and heart-burning, and in their early married lives had not been sorry to be far apart, so that neither could spy out the leanness of the housekeeping of the other.

Mrs. Grale sighed when she saw her sister's letter on the corner of the little breakfast tray, but she was in no particular hurry to open it: poor sister Marget's scant correspondence was certainly not of the deeply interesting kind. Mrs. Gibson was not given to indulge either in sentiment or epigram. Seldom had she anything to say about life, except that Mr. Gibson had a cold, that the school attendance was keeping up, that the crops were poor, or that measles prevailed in the neighbourhood. Perhaps she had a feeling that it was unsisterly to leave any blank on her sheet of note-paper, but it was equally certain that it was generally filled only by a great effort.

"There seems nothing in the world but family trouble," bewailed Mrs. Grale, taking up her letter. "At least, there has been nothing else for poor Marget and me. She has grown so used to misery that she never says anything about it now. I suppose I shall do the same in time."

"You *make* your own partly, mamma—fretting after Alny. He is sure to turn up soon."

"But he does not write," said Mrs. Grale. "Well, well, let me see what Marget says," added she, taking up the letter. "Nothing much, I daresay."

But when Mrs. Grale broke the unwieldy seal, and found two well-filled sheets within, she uttered an exclamation of interest, sure that something unusual had happened at last.

"My dear sister Polly," wrote Mrs. Gibson, "I am sure you will

be surprised to hear again from me so soon, but really since I had that unexpected sight of your son, you seem never out of mind, and there seems always something bringing you up. I do hope you will write to me very soon, for I had such strange dreams the week before last—all with you in them—that I feel quite nervous; and having nobody to say a word to (for I couldn't mention to Mr. Gibson what he would call such nonsense) only serves to make me worse. The dreams began on a Tuesday night—it was the twentieth of October. I seemed to be in a wild, dreary place, where there was a dreadful-looking pool surrounded by dark trees, and I felt as if I were tossing up and down in icy-cold water, and I could hear you sobbing and crying. I woke up once, and I can tell you, Polly, my fright was so bad that I shook the bed; after a bit, I fell asleep again, and the dream came back. I do hope you are quite well and that there is no trouble. I've had the same dream since; not every night, but often; it's not quite so vivid as at first, but has other things mixed up in it—things there's no use writing about."

"Ah, poor Marget!" sighed Mrs. Grale.

"But I am not writing to you now to tell you of this particularly," proceeded the letter. "Mr. Gibson says there's nothing in dreams, and if there is, we don't understand it, so it comes to the same thing. I write to ask if your son, Allan, is at home?"

Mrs. Grale gave an eager cry. Her sister's dim, straggling caligraphy swam before her eyes, but she went on with her perusal.

"This morning," wrote Mrs. Gibson, "my husband got a letter from an old pupil of his, who is clerk at a little railway station on the Highland line. Many of my husband's old scholars write to him: it shows they must have liked him, though he is so strict and silent. It's well that somebody keeps him in mind; though at times I think it hurts him more to find that strangers think of their duty to him, while his own—ah, Polly, may you never know the like of what we have had to pass through!"

"I've begun to know it already!" broke off Mrs. Grale with a gasp.

"Well, this young railway clerk, Thomas Milne, who often writes to Mr. Gibson, said he wrote this time to ask if we could tell anything about a little box, that was lying at his Highland station, directed to a Mr. Allan Grale, to wait there till sent for or called for. He wrote that it had been lying there more than a week, and he was afraid there might be some mistake. Young Milne was employed at Savoch station when your son and his friend were here, and he knew Mr. Grale was my nephew—for everybody in these little places knows everything—and he knew the gentlemen had gone south, and he thought perhaps the box had been sent by somebody who believed them to be still in the north, and that its contents might get spoiled if it lay long in the damp station. So please tell your son this. The name of Thomas Milne's present station is Corrabuin, and it is on the branch line. And now no more for the present, but don't delay to

write me a word or two, for those dreams trouble me and make me often shiver. We are in our usual health. They are saying the winter will be a hard one. I am, dear Polly, your ever affectionate sister, MARGARET GIBSON."

Mrs. Grale's first emotion, in spite of the dreams, was of relief. She thought she had obtained a clue to Allan's whereabouts and plans.

"Mary Anne," she cried, "your brother has gone back to the North."

Mary Anne was standing in front of the cheval glass, trying the effect of a re-arrangement of her skirt-drapery: she turned round.

"Surely he has never gone to Savoch!" she exclaimed.

"No," explained the mother, "not to Savoch; but your aunt has found out that a box is waiting for him at a little station—what is it?—not so far away. It is addressed to Alny—to be called for or sent for. He is sure to be going there. Dear, dear!" she added, in a flutter of anxiety, "these letters take so long, going and coming, that he may have been there by this time. They would never dream of detaining him or getting his address, and we may have again lost sight of him."

"Well, you can now rest assured he is safe, at all events," said Mary Anne, as she took up her aunt's letter, and saw by the date that no time had been lost in the transit. "Why, mamma, no time has been lost," she cried. "Besides, when Allan does get to a civilized station, he is sure to write to you; for my part, I think he must have been lost in a wood."

"We must send after your papa to the mill, Mary Anne—and get him to take some action at once."

Mary Anne was silent. For her own part, she was not sure that her father knew nothing of Allan's proceedings and movements, or would be in any special haste to open communication with him. She hinted at this.

"I suppose your father will do as he likes, after all," fumed Mrs. Grale, vexed; "but we might suggest something to him. He might take it up, perhaps. Do you think we ought to telegraph—or write—or what, Mary Anne? It is too far for me to go, or else I'd like to."

Mary Anne shook her head.

"Perhaps papa will decline to do anything," she said. "And even if he did, if he wrote, say, since he and Allan have evidently quarrelled, Allan might not answer back: and then we should be again exactly as we are now."

"If I could only get at Allan myself," wailed poor Mrs. Grale. "Then I could find out exactly what is the matter—he would tell me, his mother. After all, I don't know that we need tell your father of this letter. We might telegraph ourselves. When things began to come right again—as they are sure to do—he would not be so very angry."

"You haven't the very faintest idea what they have quarrelled about?" questioned Mary Anne, who was inclined to suspect that her parents might have some confidences aside from herself.

Mrs. Grale shook her head. "I know no more than you do," she said. "I don't even know that there has been any quarrel. Only your father was so stern and angry that night, and depressed too, that I thought they must have had words. Sometimes I think he knows no more of Alny than we know."

Mary Anne mused. "I wonder who those men were that came up here the next evening, after Allan had gone? Of course I thought at the time they were only commission agents or travellers, or something of that sort. But since then I have wondered whether they brought any ill story of Allan to papa."

The girl broke off. Her mother was looking at her intently.

"You're sure you don't know more than I do, Mary Anne?" she pleaded. "You are not keeping anything back?"

Mary Anne laughed uneasily. "Little enough," she said. "Indeed nothing." But she told Mrs. Grale what she had heard at Dr. Palmer's: the doctor's curious question as to whether Allan had gone off in the night, and the finding of the hidden hamper.

Mrs. Grale made no comment. "I wonder," she said aloud, "who it is that has sent that box to Corrabuin?"

"The present question is, What are you going to do about the box, mamma? You could telegraph."

"And suppose Alny has fetched away the box already?" suggested bewildered Mrs. Grale.

"You might telegraph also to the station master, prepaying reply, to let you know if such is the case."

Mrs. Grale was duly impressed by her daughter's readiness of resource. "There was not much telegraphing when I was young," she said, "and somehow we never do get fully accustomed to fashions that come up in our later life. You had better write the telegrams for me, Mary Anne; you are more used to such things than I am."

Mary Anne took a pencil and a sheet of paper. She first composed the message to the station master. She had no doubts about that.

"Please wire immediately whether a box directed to Mr. Allan Grale is still at Corrabuin. Answer paid."

But as she turned to write that for Allan she appealed to her mother. "What do you wish to have said?"

"Tell him I want to hear of him. Tell him his father need not know. Tell him a letter will follow to the same address," said Mrs. Grale, in hasty incoherence.

"I don't know whether they'd take in a letter at the station," hesitated Mary Anne. "But I can manage."

She wrote: "Your mother is in great anxiety. Your father does

not know of this clue, nor need he. A letter will follow, directed to wait at Corrabuin post office."

"I will send these telegrams off myself," she said.

"All Dering will hear of them," bewailed Mrs. Grale.

"The telegraph people are bound to secrecy, mamma."

"I would not trust them, child."

Mary Anne paused. She bethought herself of the more remote railway station of Carstow, whence George Vivian had been coming the night she and her mother had taken him into the carriage. Carstow was on the main line, a busy station, quite removed from petty local interests and curiosity.

"I will take the carriage and drive to Carstow," she said. "But I will bid the Scotch station master direct his answer to this house. His reply, 'The box is still here,' or 'The box has been called for,' can signify little to anybody."

"It's very good of you to take so much trouble, Mary Anne," said her mother: "for I know you are too vexed with Alny to be doing this out of any feeling but pity and kindness to me. Make haste back as soon as you can, my dear; I shall weary for you dreadfully.

"The reply telegram will be here nearly as soon as I am," observed Mary Anne.

When Mary Anne Grale approached Carstow she alighted from the carriage and left it at a little distance from the station, so that the coachman should not observe which department she entered. Getting her papers from her pocket and glancing through them, she walked absently forward and nearly jostled against a gentleman who was leaving the telegraph office. She recoiled with a hasty apology. As she looked up, she saw George Vivian!

They stopped and exchanged the usual salutations.

"Can I do your business for you?" he asked politely.

"No, thank you," said Mary Anne with well-acted carelessness "It is a mere trifle. I shall despatch it in a moment."

George understood that as a hint that he might wait for her. He was not altogether disinclined. He looked pale and nervous—in one of those restless moods when men are glad of any distraction from themselves.

Mary Anne came out of the office serene and smiling, and she and George walked away together. George's horse was being held outside. He took it from the lad, and led it.

"So I cannot offer you a seat to-day," said Mary Anne.

"No; but I can act equerry, and ride beside you," he answered.

"And so the General still continues to make satisfactory progress?" she observed, as they went along, she in the carriage, he riding.

"Yes, and we hope he will continue to do so," answered George. "But Maria seems very unwell."

"I am sorry for that," said Mary Anne; "she has not looked well

for some time past. You are not looking well yourself, Mr. Vivian. Mamma was quite distressed about you the other day. You looked terribly worn, she said."

George gave a peculiar smile. "I don't think Dering air suits me," he answered. "As soon as health and tranquillity are restored at the Court, I shall take some change. Not a runaway holiday, but a long change of six or eight months. I can always occupy myself with my sketching."

"Just as you did at Redbourne," said Mary Anne. "I can't think how that place agreed with you, if Dering doesn't; I thought it most relaxing."

"I don't know that it did agree with me," returned George. "I think the North suits me best. I shall go there perhaps."

"I am sure I should like the North," said Mary Anne. "It is where Alny has gone again."

"Has he, really?" exclaimed George with surprise. For, having been again away himself, he knew nothing of Alny's absence. "What a sly dog, to go without telling me!"

"Your brother Edgar knew," said Mary Anne.

"Did he? I wonder he did not mention it to me. I thought Alny was settled at home for the winter."

Mary Anne sighed dramatically. "I'm afraid Alny is not always happy at home; he and papa do not get on well together at all times. Probably papa is rather severe. You young men give a great deal of trouble," she added. "I am sorry for poor mamma. Not knowing exactly where Alny is makes it very trying to her. It is the lot of woman to sit at home, and wait, and wear out her heart," sighed Mary Anne, not wanting consolation, but wanting to be consoled by George Vivian.

"We don't deserve much trouble to be taken about us," said George hastily; but his tone was not sympathetic, it was rather bitter.

"I have just been sending off a telegram to Alny," said Mary Anne, unable to resist indulging herself in so delightful a confidence. "Do you happen to know a place in the North—the far North, I imagine—called Corrabuin?"

"Corrabuin!" repeated George. "No, I don't remember the name. It is not easy to bear those outlandish words in mind. Is Allan there?"

"He is, or will be—according to what we have heard this morning. I hope we shall soon hear from Alny himself."

They were now drawing near Dering, and began to pass people whom they knew. Mary Anne liked very well to be seen with George Vivian riding beside her equipage.

Presently they both saw advancing at a little distance, a slight-made woman in black, with a long yellow cloak thrown over her. She wore a small close bonnet, and a veil was drawn over her face.

"Do you know who this woman is?" cried Mary Anne hastily.

"No," said George; "but I have seen her about. She seems a queer person and to have queer ways. People call her the 'Yellow woman.' She—why, where's she gone?"

For, even as he spoke, as they were both looking, the woman seemed to disappear. She had in fact stepped through a gap in the hedge, and was hiding behind it. As they went by, they could see her pale face peering through the twigs, evidently as eager to see as reluctant to be seen.

"How very strange!" exclaimed Mary Anne. "She seems to be afraid of us. It is the same woman that has been following Alny about ever since he came back with you from Scotland."

"Following Alny about!" repeated George Vivian. "What did she do that for?"

"He did not know; he spoke to me about it once. She never accosted him; only seemed to watch him."

They looked back. She had come from behind the hedge now, and was standing still to gaze after them, her dark veil thrown back.

"A little mad perhaps," said George.

The woman stood gazing until they were out of sight. Then she resumed her way with a sobbing sigh and some passionate words.

"It is often so! it is often so!"

And there came a look on the pale, clear-cut face which signified that there was somebody in the world who might be all the safer for not being just then within the reach or the power of that yellow-cloaked woman.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT OLD BRICE HEARD.

Leaving Miss Grale's carriage when it took the turning to Moorland House, George Vivian rode home to the Court. Lunch, always taken early at the General's, appeared to be over, but it had been left on the table for George.

During the past few days Maria had been looking and feeling very ill indeed, and Mrs. Vivian had consulted Dr. Palmer about her. George wondered to himself whether Allan Grale's absence—which he had but now heard of—had anything to do with her increased sickness. That they were most ardently attached to one another, he knew well. Mary Anne had allowed a hint to escape her—or else he had somehow contrived to gather the impression without a hint—that Alny's people did not know much about his movements, or why he had gone from home. Could it be that he had got into some mess? And that Maria knew of it?

George had soon finished. Of late his appetite had not been good. He rang the bell for the things to be taken away, and then strolled towards the window. On a side table, amidst other unused small

books and papers, lay a dog-eared yellow-covered pamphlet. George took it up carelessly: he was feeling dreary and had nothing to do: and found it was the railway guide which he and Allan had used during their Scotch tour. George fluttered its leaves idly over, and in so doing his eye was caught by a line of ink drawn beneath some name in one of the time-tables. What had that been done for? When had they done it? What bright day on heathery hill or silver loch would it recal? Scarcely noticing what he did, he turned over the pages to find it again, which was not readily done among the thin, damp, curled leaves. There it was at last!

And the place underlined was "Corrabuin."

"Most singular!" said George. "This is the way in which I have often noticed that when once our attention is directed to anything, it forces itself back upon our attention again and again. Corrabuin? I don't remember being there. No, I see it is not on any line by which we travelled. It must have been Allan who marked it, for some reasons of his own:—only likely, since he has gone there or near there now. Surely, nothing on earth is taking him up to Ragan!" George Vivian started as the thought presented itself. In the bare possibility of such a thing, there seemed something specially disquieting to him.

"I didn't think Allan was at all struck with Ragan," he mused. "No, he would never think of going there again. He will wander about, staying nowhere for more than a day or two—I know his ways. And just because he has been there once he would not think of returning to it; he would want pastures new. Indeed it would be absurd for anyone to pay a passing visit to Ragan now, considering what preparations one has to make to get there at this season of the year. Why, it needs almost as much foresight and provision as to start for a voyage round the world!"

But how came George Vivian himself to know so well about the difficulties which would beset a winter visit to that Highland farm of Ragan? It had been only autumn when he was there, with every ingress and egress made easy for the tourist.

"No, no, I need not trouble myself," he decided. "Alny will never go there. And even if he did—I don't suppose any harm would come of it. But it's odd what he can have gone to Scotland for so soon again—so far away, and so late in the year!—and without telling me! Perhaps he came up to do that, though, when I was away."

"Stephen," he said to the man who had answered his ring and was now busy with the things on the table, "did Mr. Allan Grale come here to see me while I was away this last time, do you know?"

Stephen — who had been many years in the family and was perfectly at home with the two young men, having stood their friend in many a boyish scrape—turned round to reply.

"No, sir, not that I know of. I think—I'm not quite sure—but

I think Mr. Allan was gone away himself before you went the last time. Two or three days before it."

"Do you know when he did go?"

"Not exactly, sir. I believe nobody does know. James, their head man—a very civil fellow whom I see sometimes,—tells me he does not think it is known at his home how Mr. Allan went or why he went. He had dinner by himself one evening when the rest of the family were out; he seemed to make great haste over it, James says, and left the house afterwards, and he never came into it again, so far as James can find out."

"Did he take no luggage with him?—Did he not prepare for a journey?" reiterated George.

"I fancy not, sir; James thinks not. The poor mother, Mrs. Grale, has hardly been out of her rooms upstairs since; she sits there grieving. Of course James has told me this in confidence," added Stephen. "I've not repeated it to anybody till now, sir, and I shan't do it."

"No, don't," said George. "Mind you don't."

Stephen drew nearer to his young master. "There's something being said now, Mr. George, that I don't like to hear," he said in a low voice—"that harm has come to him."

"To Mr. Allan! In what way?"

"It was the old gardener whispered it to me, sir, not an hour ago. He was leaning over the railings by the little gate as I went along the path, and he made a sign to me to go to him. What he said was, that Mr. Allan Grale was now being talked of in connection with the Black Pool; meaning that it was feared he was lying in it."

"Stephen!—for Heaven's sake don't say such a thing!" cried George aghast.

"Mr. George, it was Brice said it; it wasn't me. He said he didn't know how the report could have cropped up, and the person that told him didn't know if it was thought to be suicide, or if Mr. Allan had been flung in by some enemy. He——"

"Stop, stop," interrupted George in a tone of intense relief. "I had forgotten for the moment. Mrs. Grale had a telegram from her son this morning," added he, slightly confusing facts in his mind, but not aware that he was doing so. "He is in Scotland. I saw Miss Grale at the station when she went there to telegraph back to him."

"What a mercy!" exclaimed Stephen. "That's just how gossip gets about—and not a word of foundation for it. I'm so glad I mentioned it to you, Mr. George; it has eased my mind. I always liked Mr. Allan."

"Look here, Stephen, I should not talk of this. Not to anyone; not at all, you understand. I shall not."

"Indeed I won't, sir."

In the course of the afternoon, Dr. Palmer came up, bringing his

daughter Agnes to see Maria. Edgar saw their approach from a window, and passed through the hall to go out of doors as they entered it.

Edgar Vivian had not been in the habit of walking away thus from Agnes Palmer. She saw how pointed it was, and felt something like a stab at her heart. She had been disappointed by Edgar's failures at college: her keen vitality had revolted against what she had deemed his listless and loitering ways. She had been cold; she had been sharp. She knew all that. Lettice knew it too, and had always seemed half ready to blame her for it. But her coldness had been intended only to stimulate Edgar's self-respect, her sharpness to brace his energies. Alas, alas! if they had only made him shun and turn from her! Poor true heart, hers was not the first to find itself a sacrifice to its own loyalty.

Dr. Palmer went up-stairs to the invalids, intending to see Maria first, leaving his daughter to be entertained by George. Mrs. Vivian was in the General's room.

"What a stranger you are getting to be at Dering, Mr. Vivian," remarked Agnes. "You are not often here now."

"I have had some matters to attend to in London and elsewhere. How is Charles Carr?" questioned George, abruptly turning from the other topic.

"He is very well indeed—despite all injustice," answered Agnes briskly. "Have you heard that Mr. Grale offered for him to go back to the office?"

No, George had not heard that.

"Oh, but he did. Papa would not allow Charles to accept the offer; he said it came too late and that Mr. Grale had behaved with too much harshness at the beginning. Did you ever hear the whole story, Mr. Vivian?"

"I don't know exactly what you mean by the whole story," replied George. "There had been some roguery committed on him about money matters, forgery, or something of that sort, and Mr. Grale's suspicions fell on Charles, which seems to me to be very absurd."

"That was it," assented Agnes. "But Mr. Grale was not frank and candid with Charles at first; he did not explain; though nobody could have blamed him for asking questions. The identity of the names did look suspicious. Papa and Charles are both ready to admit that."

"The identity of the names?" repeated George. "I do not understand. I have not heard any details of that sort."

"Then I must explain to you," said the young lady. "It appears that the forged cheques and bill were made payable to a Mr. Mark Bedell. And Mark Bedell was the name of the hero in a story of fiction which Charles wrote and had in his desk at his office. Fancy Charlie writing a story!"

"Well that's strange!" exclaimed George, alluding to the identity of names. "How is it to be accounted for?"

"We have thought it over in all ways at home, and can only suspect that the guilty man must have seen the name in the manuscript and borrowed it," answered Agnes. "Charles declares he never saw the name in all his life; he made it up out of his own head. It came into his head in a moment, he says, while he was hesitating about a name for his hero."

"Perhaps Charles may have seen it somewhere unconsciously—without noticing, you know—and that's why it came into his head.

Miss Agnes Palmer shook her own pretty head. "Papa said that; but Charles says 'No.' He is very positive about it."

"But, if it was borrowed from his manuscript, it could only have been done by one of his fellow clerks," debated George. "I should have thought them all above suspicion."

"Yes, it seems a very mysterious business. But is it not a shame that Charlie will not let us see that story?" added the girl. "We should so like to read it. Papa thinks he is really going to be very clever."

"What, to prove a famous novelist?" laughed George.

"No, I don't mean that; Charles's talents have come out in quite another line. During these idle days of his he has been a great deal in papa's surgery, and he has hit on one or two splendid ideas concerning surgical instruments. One had been put in use already—though Charlie did not know it, but the other is absolutely original. Papa says for him to be in the mill office was a sinful waste of time; so this unpleasantness, by driving him out of it, has done him a wonderful service."

"I thought always that there was something remarkable about Charles Carr," observed George. "But is this story-writing, of his, half a secret still? I long to chaff him about it."

"Oh, don't, please," said Agnes earnestly. "When I first heard about it, I could not help teasing him, and I thought the distress he showed was assumed in play. But it was in earnest—and papa told me never to speak of it to him. It hurts him somehow. He did promise Lettice he would not burn it. He even said to her that she should see it, if anybody ever did."

At that moment, Dr. Palmer came into the room. He looked grave and anxious. Miss Vivian was very ill to-day he said, but she would see Agnes.

Agnes went upstairs at once, her father telling her she must only stay a few minutes. The girl stole softly into the room and found it darkened. She could only see the outline of Maria's slight figure leaning back upon the cushions of her sofa. But Agnes could feel the fever heat of the trembling hand.

"It is very naughty of you, dear, to get ill like this, just when your uncle is recovering and everything is going to be so happy," said Agnes.

"Nothing can ever be happy long in this terrible world," whispered Maria.

"Oh, don't say that! you are so good and patient, Maria, that you might bear to believe that for yourself; but you couldn't long bear to believe it for other people."

"It may not be true for everybody," said Maria. "It is true for me."

"No, it is not," persisted Agnes. "It may seem so to us; sometimes when there is nothing amiss but our own nerves—sometimes when things go a little wrong. But they come right again by and by. When that cruel thing was said about Charles Carr——By the way," broke off Agnes, "have you heard that Mr. Grale has now asked Charles to return to the office?"

"Oh, has he?"

"But it is declined. Putting other objections aside, Charles has found out that he is fit for a much better kind of work. I know Allan will be glad to hear it, but he is still away. I know he was vexed at the turn matters took about poor Charles. Mary Anne Grale said so the other day at our house."

"Did Miss Grale say where her brother had gone?" inquired Maria, who was looking strangely depressed.

"Not exactly; no."

"Agnes," said Maria, in a low, strange voice, "have you heard anything—any report—any detail—about Allan's going away?"

Agnes hesitated. She did not wish to trouble Maria with the various little dishes of tattle that were going about.

"Tell me exactly what you have heard," persisted Maria, steadily. "I am not asking out of idle curiosity."

"Has Edgar told you anything, Maria?"

"No," said Maria, with a wailing note in her voice. "He has never named Allan to me since he went away!"

"Well," said Agnes, having collected her thoughts, "it is nothing so very bad; disputes happen in most families. It is said that Allan went away secretly without telling any of them, and that he and Mr. Grale had had some quarrel. Remember, this may be all idle talk," she added.

Maria sat upright on her sofa. "Tell me this, Agnes, tell me quite truly—have you heard any hint that the Grales themselves do not know where Allan is? that they have never heard of him at all since his departure?"

Agnes was glad of the dusky twilight of the darkened room. "People gossip all sorts of things," she answered, lightly. "I fancy some report of this kind has been set afloat by the Grale servants; but you know, Maria, how void of foundation such gossip generally is."

Maria Vivian gazed at her. "I cannot be sure you are not keeping something back, Agnes. It is cruel of you to force me to put question after question. Have you heard—any whisper—about—about ——

Maria Vivian's agitation did not allow her to go on. Miss Palmer gazed at her with surprise.

"About what, Maria?"

"Suicide."

The low, dread tone and the word alike sent a chill over Agnes Palmer.

"Suicide!" she echoed. "Nobody has dreamed of such a thing. If that was at all likely, do you imagine the Grales would be as they are—easy and quiet?"

"The Grales may not have any reason yet to suspect such a fear," returned Maria.

"You are giving way to nervous and morbid fancies, Maria," pleaded Agnes, tenderly. "You have been over-worn and over-worried lately; and now, instead of going about among friendly faces in the sunshine, you sit up in this darkened room, and conjure up fearful visions! Indeed you ought to have better sense."

"I think Edgar knows something is wrong," returned Maria. "He has been strange and gloomy ever since Allan went away."

"Because he sees that you are gloomy. But now, Maria, will you tell me what gave rise to this dreadful idea in your mind?"

"Never mind that," answered Maria, not caring to confess, after Agnes's observations on the gossip of servants, that her maid had let fall half a word to her earlier in the day. Brice, the old gardener at the Court, now almost superannuated, had imparted his news to some one as well as to Stephen.

"Put the fear from you, Maria. You will make Edgar as ill as yourself soon," Agnes added gently, "if you keep him in this dull, airless room, and alarm him with ——"

"I don't keep him," said Maria. "I am not all selfish yet—though I do think misery makes us so. Mind, I say misery; not sorrow. I tell Edgar to go out—to make visits. But no! He seems to want to shun people himself. He would not stay indoors just now, even to see you. But he does not sit in my room."

Agnes was silent.

"His sister's doom overshadows him," cried Maria, wildly. "That's the worst of it, Agnes. Neither sins nor sorrows can be kept to ourselves. Others get overwhelmed by them. No one knows where they may fasten, and ——"

"Darling," whispered Agnes, with her arms about Maria's neck, "God is over all. His hand is strong enough to bear us through everything."

"Yes. But—He seems to let us drop sometimes," cried the fevered girl.

"Only out of His hand into His heart. Believe that."

No more time was allowed to Agnes; her father sent for her, and she had to hurry away.

"The General still keeps improving," remarked Dr. Palmer, as they walked homewards.

"I am glad of that," said Agnes. "But I think Maria is very ill, papa. She is giving way to most horrible fancies."

"Is she?" somewhat absently returned the doctor.

"She asked me—she is fancying—oh it is such a dreadful idea, papa—that Allan Grale has committed suicide."

"Eh!" cried Dr. Palmer, stopping short and staring at his daughter, "is *that* what is wrong with Maria Vivian?"

He laughed a little to himself as he went on. Agnes thought his manner peculiar.

"How did she pick up that notion?"

"She would not say, papa. It is not—not likely to be true, is it?"

"Why of course it is not, child. Allan Grale may be addicted to going carelessly, after the fashion of young men, but he is not one to commit a sin of that grave kind. None more unlikely to do it than he."

"So I should have thought. Poor Maria! Her mind must be wrong."

"She'll soon hear news to put it right," said the Doctor. "George has just told me that Alny is in Scotland. His mother had a telegram from him this morning."

"Oh, what a good thing—if she has been worrying herself!" exclaimed Agnes. "How thankful they must all be!"

But neither Dr. Palmer nor his daughter, nor yet George Vivian, had any idea that their impression was a mistaken one—and that no telegram, or news either, had come from Allan Grale.

(To be continued.)

MISS BEAUCHAMP'S WILL.

By J. M. Wharton.

IN the drawing-room of a small but comfortable country house on the outskirts of the village of Bloomfield sat a lady and gentleman of middle age. Both were evidently ill at ease; and the cause of their disquietude was to be found in the person of a young man who stood before them pleading with vehemence and persisting for some favour.

"I don't ask to marry your daughter to-day or to-morrow," explained the young man, Walter Keeling: "I only want you to allow things to remain in their present state."

"But things are entirely altered, and your pretensions now are preposterous," replied the lady, Mrs. Foster. "Your engagement to Mabel was sanctioned under the belief that you would inherit Woolcroft."

"And having lost the property, I lose her too; that is hard."

"Hard or not, you have expressed the case exactly. Having lost the property you lose Mabel too."

"Mr. Foster," cried Keeling, appealing now to the husband as possessed probably of more tenderness of heart than his plain-spoken partner. "Mr. Foster, I am not quite a pauper, although Woolcroft has gone, and I can command some influence to advance me in my career; so will you not permit our engagement to stand? With such a stimulus as the hope of marrying Mabel I should soon attain a position."

After a momentary glance into the lad's handsome, eager face, the gentleman thus importuned turned his regard upon his own hands and was absorbed for the next few moments in bringing his right fingers and thumb to bear carefully on their fellows on the left hand. As soon as this operation had been accomplished with precision, he gave his attention to the question before him.

"You know, my dear boy," he began in an unctuous voice, "how much I esteem you personally, but a parent must not indulge in private feeling; he has only to fulfil the solemn obligations which Providence has imposed upon him; and so I am compelled to reject your suit. It pains me, my dear boy, though; it really pains me."

"Riches are not necessary for happiness, especially to a woman," cried poor Keeling.

Mr. Foster offered neither objection nor assent to this abstract reflection upon human life; so the poor lover could only shift his feet and turn his restless gaze from one to the other of his opponents in search of a fresh argument. Perhaps it was a kindly pity for the

young man with his miserable expression of defeat that led Mrs. Foster to distract his attention with a fresh subject.

"Do you think it possible," asked she, "that the will exists and is only lying in some unsuspected hiding-place?"

"No," answered Keeling, promptly; "search has been made everywhere, and a thorough one. Moreover, my poor old cousin never used but the one writing-table; there she kept all papers and every document relating to business."

"And very likely it contains a secret drawer or some place of that description," exclaimed the lady, sharply.

"That poor old bureau, to be accused of such a romantic accessory as a secret receptacle!" cried the young fellow, with a lighter laugh than most men could have given who had newly made friends with ill-fortune. "No, it is certain there is none," he added, seriously; "for Mr. Paget, who knew her habits, expected to have found a place of the sort when the will was not forthcoming; and the unlucky old piece of furniture was dragged about and examined in every particular. It was then proved that there was no cranny of space where it could have existence."

"Well! it is mysterious."

"Paget says my cousin must have destroyed the will herself. All the world knows that she made a will years ago, leaving everything of which she was possessed to me; but it is certain she was dreadfully offended with me last summer when I went off to sea," said Keeling—easy candour was one of the young man's most notable characteristics—"and the act of destroying the will in her first warmth of anger would have been just like the dear old impulsive soul. She was afterwards quite reconciled to me, however, and beyond doubt intended my having Woolcroft."

"Most certainly; of that there can be no second opinion; but then why in the world did she not take measures to ensure it?"

"Ah! that's curious. In talking over the matter, Paget let out a fact, which he thinks bears on the case. He had an appointment with her for two o'clock of the very day on which my cousin died. Not knowing of her sudden illness, he arrived at the Hall punctually, and then first heard of the fit that had overtaken her an hour or two before. She was lying insensible at the time, and died in the same state that night. So Paget considers she had some fears on the score of her health, and the business on which she had sent for him was to take her instructions for a new will."

"That seems a probable explanation."

"My poor cousin's death was a tremendous shock to me, and I was awfully sorry that I was away at the time," Keeling added, with an earnestness of face and manner that showed his feelings were warm and genuine, if of no great depth.

"Well! it was a bad day's work for you."

"The loss of fortune will scarcely be regretted by me, if you will

sanction the continuance of my engagement with Mabel, sir!" he cried, appealing to Mr. Foster. "See for how long we have looked upon ourselves as belonging to each other!"

"Actually four months!" rejoined the lady in tones of irony.

As for Mr. Foster, that estimable gentleman had followed the conversation pretty closely, while it had turned upon the missing will; but by this time he had withdrawn his attention from current trivialities, and with closed eyes was deep in reflection—doubtlessly colouring fresh theories of a parent's responsibilities.

It was at length patent to Walter Keeling how futile were all attempts to win over these Spartan parents, so he took his leave of them. As he crossed the hall on his way out he perceived Turner, Miss Foster's maid, loitering at the further end. "Where is Miss Foster?" he demanded of the abigail.

"She is walking in the grounds, sir."

"Sent off to be out of my way," he said to himself, bitterly, as he ran down the steps.

But in that conclusion Mr. Keeling was wrong. Her being out of doors was a device of that young lady's own, to see her lover in greater peace and privacy; and Keeling had not now proceeded a hundred yards down the main avenue before he was joined by Mabel Foster.

"Oh! my darling, my darling! They say we are to part!" he cried, as he gathered her into his arms.

"I know it," was the reply; "I know it. But what passeed?" inquired Mabel after a pause, as soon as they had found shelter in a summer-house at hand.

Keeling thereupon gave her a summary of the interview with her parents: and by the time he had finished, the short March day was closing.

"I must not linger," said Mabel, drawing herself out of his fond embrace.

"You are very ready to bid me farewell," Keeling cried, jealously.

"Walter," she said, drawing herself up to her full height, until her beautiful face glowing with love and ardour was nearly on a level with his: "Walter, do you believe this parting to be any less bitter to me than to you?"

"Forgive me, dearest, and now promise that you will wait for me, and not let other fellows come dangling after you, talking nonsense. Wait for me, and I will work as no one ever yet worked, and soon return to claim you, a son-in-law Mr. Foster will have no need to blush for. It is hard that we may not be openly engaged and write to one another: but do not forget me, Mabel."

"Do you think you will remember me in all the changes of your new life?" she asked, sadly.

"Mabel!" he exclaimed. "Of what stuff do you think me made? Besides, no other woman would bear comparison with you, so I must needs be faithful," answered he in fondest flattery. "No, I shall

never change ; and upon your part, my own love, you must pledge yourself to be true."

"I do not need to make any promises, Walter ; I shall never waver."

"That is all right then ; and we shall go down to all generations of lovers as an example of faithful devotion."

At the remark Mabel looked up suddenly with a curious expression in her dark eyes ; but, whatever the thought in her mind as she scanned his countenance, she did not give expression to it.

"It is growing late," she observed aloud, noticing how the twilight had deepened. "I must go in now or I shall be sought for."

"My darling, this separation, although I hope and pray and believe it is but for a very short time, is very bitter," complained Keeling, and then after tenderest kisses he let the girl depart.

Just twelve weeks had passed since the old walls of Woolcroft Hall had last echoed to the light laugh of Walter Keeling, when it was rumoured that the new owner, Mr. Grey, had arrived to take possession in person of his lawful heritage. Mr. Foster hastened to tender his homage to the reigning sovereign, and that evening entertained his wife and daughter with extravagant praise of the new comers, ending with the following admonition to his wife.

"Bear in mind, my dear, that young Grey is coming to dine with us to-morrow; our usual hour and dinner will do very well. I invited the father, who pleaded a cold in excuse ; but I gather he lives very much to himself—been a widower for years. The young man, though, will be an acquisition as a neighbour."

Mr. Foster as he spoke strove to see in what temper Mabel was preparing to receive the new favourites. No remark could be elicited from her, but she listened to his account of his visit with a curl on her lip that boded mischief and insubordination. The extent of that insubordination, though, never dawned upon his mind until the following evening, when, upon the announcement of dinner, he, Mrs. Foster, and their guest arose in obedience to the summons ; but Mabel, who should have made the fourth at the table was still absent. In reply to a remark from her father, with slightly contracted brows, upon her delay in making her appearance, Mrs. Foster volunteered some sort of explanation.

"I believe she does not intend to dine with us : perhaps she does not feel very well."

"Where is she? I must go and see her," was the response of the anxious and affectionate father. "If you will excuse me for a minute or two?" he added to his guest.

Perceiving Mrs. Foster to be from some cause embarrassed and preoccupied in mind, Mr. Lionel Grey, thus left alone with that lady, attempted no conversation ; but, sauntering across the room, he first waited at the open French window, and then stepped out on to the verandah. Before he was well aware to whose voices he was listening,

an important scrap of conversation reached his ears, the sounds being floated from an adjacent window with unmistakeable clearness through the still summer air.

"Why are you not dining with us, Mabel?"

An unknown voice, sweet and girlish, though with some defiance in its tones, replied: "I am going to have some tea here, papa."

"May I inquire the reason of this remarkable proceeding?"

"I think we should be in no hurry to entertain these strangers and interlopers, considering the long friendship that existed between ourselves and poor Miss Beauchamp—not to speak of others."

"Indeed! but, my dear Mabel, you will have to control your sensitive feelings and meet our neighbours. I have no time, though, now to waste in an absurd discussion, and I do not choose to offend Mr. Grey; so what excuse am I to give for your absence?"

"Say that I have a complication of disorders," cried poor Mabel. "Or you may tell the truth, and declare that I will not meet the monster who has robbed poor Walter Keeling of his inheritance."

The flattering allusion to himself recalling to his mind the saying concerning listeners and what they hear, drew Grey's attention to the equivocal position that he was filling, and he hastily retired again within the room. A minute or two later Mr. Foster rejoined them, but the only allusion that gentleman made as to his late quest was the remark muttered low, as they took their seats at table: "Mabel is, or imagines herself to be, out of sorts."

Dinner over Mr. Foster invited his guest to light a cigar, and take a stroll in the twilit garden—which proposition having been favourably received by Grey, they commenced pacing a broad walk bounding the lawn. From this main road, narrow paths branched off at intervals; and as the two gentlemen in a few minutes crossed one of these openings a figure was to be seen in rapid advance up the smaller path. But, evidently dismayed by the sudden discovery of the immediate neighbourhood of the two gentlemen, it paused and shrank back into the bushes, as though wishful to escape observation. If so, the movement was futile, for Mr. Foster called out loudly: "Mabel!" Thereupon the form without further hesitation advanced from the shade of the trees, and stood revealed as that of a young girl. Very fair and very youthful she appeared to Grey's admiring gaze as she came forward, and her beauty was heightened by the simplicity of her attire. She was clad in a plain white gown, which was only relieved by a bunch of red roses thrust in her waistbelt, with another fresh bud or two at her throat. Her eyes were soft and dark, the young man perceived as she lifted them for a moment's steady survey of himself; and her whole face promised thought and feeling in no common degree.

"My daughter, Mr. Grey," said Mr. Foster in introduction; whereupon the wilful little lady had no alternative but to give her pretty hand for a moment into the enemy's keeping.

At this crisis, as though Fate were determined to bring the pair into friendly relationship, a servant summoned Mr. Foster away to some person who had called on business; and the two young people were left to themselves.

Lionel Grey started conversation with the orthodox topic. "We are having very lovely weather, Miss Foster."

"Very," echoed Mabel, shortly, striving to maintain her dislike while glancing at the calm, good face of her companion. Lionel Grey was reckoned a very attractive man with his soft, lazy voice, his handsome person, and his air of gentle indifference to all things; but Mabel Foster only marked now the kindly expression of his countenance, and the honest, kindly eyes that forbade distrust and conquered her prejudices.

"Shall we walk on?" inquired Lionel, in his slow tones.

Miss Foster's reply was to turn, and they sauntered on through the twilight amid the flower scents in amicable silence awhile. Then Mabel spoke. "How long the days are! See, it is quite light still!"

"It was the longest day yesterday, was it not? But, pardon me, were you not afraid to venture out? the cool of the evening is rather trying to an invalid."

"An invalid?" echoed Mabel, in puzzled tones.

"An invalid like yourself, with a complication of serious disorders, Grey answered, improving his story.

"What do you mean? I never had a day's illness in my life!" the girl cried.

"Indeed! I am truly happy to hear it," he assured her, gravely.

"I do not understand you," said Mabel; but even while she was speaking, apparently some uncomfortable recollection rushed over her mind, dyeing her cheeks with crimson, and causing her head to sink in confusion as she asked: "What has papa been telling you?"

"He merely said that you were a little out of sorts, which I thought a very mild way of describing your sad condition."

Mabel looked up for some elucidation of this mystery; a mocking sense of triumph was shown in the smile that rested on Grey's lips, but she could discover nothing further. The brown eyes, though, which so frankly met her gaze, were calculated to inspire trust.

"The fact is, Mr. Grey," began Mabel, confidingly, "I have troubles, great troubles; but if you have heard anything, I hope you will believe that my resentment is not against you individually. I meant nothing personal."

"Oh, no, nothing personal, of course," Grey answered. "I am habitually referred to as a 'monster,' and am quite accustomed to the style and title."

"You are unmerciful."

"Do you think you deserve any mercy? But I will forego further vengeance upon your promising never more to indulge such unchristian sentiments."

"Very well, I promise," said Mabel, with a soft rippling laugh. And then their eyes met in pleasant sympathy and token of friendship.

"Now, Miss Foster, the sooner good resolutions are acted upon the better," appended Grey. "So you must inaugurate your having come to an improved frame of mind by the gracious act of returning with us to the drawing-room, and giving us a little music. You sing, do you not?"

No wonder Mr. Foster, who had meant at the first convenient opportunity to remonstrate with his daughter upon her Quixotic folly, renounced his intention when he saw them together; being only too well pleased to let the new order of things alone.

That night after his return home, Lionel Grey caught himself looking with curious interest at a rose which had fallen from Mabel Foster's dress, and which he had picked up from the lawn.

"Bah!" he exclaimed, as he at length flung the blossom aside. "I am too old to be staring at a rose, save as a rose and nothing more. But she is a charming little lady," he went on to say to himself, deceiving himself by the candour of the admission. "So fresh and gay, yet with plenty of sound sense; her opinions are worth hearing."

So perhaps it was regard for his mental status that led Mr. Lionel Grey to call at the Long House—as the Foster's residence was named from its form—upon so early a day; and to feel rejoiced when the discreet servant who opened the door informed him that his master and mistress were out, but Miss Mabel was in the drawing-room, if he would be pleased to walk in. And, alas, from this visit commenced a cruel misconception that bore sad fruit in the future. Knowing herself to be pledged to Walter Keeling, and under the idea that Grey had become aware of the fact, Mabel frankly accepted from Lionel Grey what she believed to be only pleasant, kindly friendship; while he was in reality offering her the first, best homage and tenderest love of his noble heart.

II.

It was June when Lionel Grey came to Woolcroft; and the wood that lay between the Hall and the Long House was clothed in its delicate summer bravery as he and Mabel Foster took their first walk through it. Since then they had paced beneath those same trees brilliant with autumn's rich dyes; and now the naked boughs of December wave over their heads, and with their feet they stir the withered leaves, which, erewhile full of life and beauty, at the moment lie in their path dead and crushed as the hopes of his heart.

People wondered why Mr. Lionel Grey, who had a much finer place in a neighbouring county, should spend so long a period of time at Woolcroft. Mabel Foster, perhaps alone, formed no conjectures on the subject. She took an interest in the improvements he effected, helped in the new schools he established; beyond these things, attribu-

ting no motive for his perpetual presence. And now it was with a shock of painful surprise that she had listened during that winter day's walk, to the tale of love he had had to tell. Upon receiving her reply —that reply, which had blasted all the fond hopes of his living heart —Grey had uttered no word of reproach. No slightest hint that she had misled him escaped from his lips; but perhaps Mabel had read some such imputation in the expression of his face. At all events, with feelings too deep and sorrowful to admit of any embarrassment or blushing hesitation, she explained her relations with Walter Keeling.

"And I always thought," she added, eagerly, "I always believed that from the first you knew all the circumstances of the case."

"No, I did not; never mind," said Lionel, with a protecting gentleness of manner. "Do not let it worry you."

Mabel heard the quiet tones of his voice, and was comforted to think no great mischief had been done—that he did not care so very much after all. She did not as yet comprehend the great unselfish heart that would spare her every pang, hiding its own suffering, not to wound the soft girlbreast. A time was to come when she would better understand the depth and tenderness of the man's nature.

Silence reigned until they reached Miss Foster's garden-gate, where Grey prepared to leave her. As she bade him farewell, Mabel lifted her eyes for a moment, and looked into his face, which was blanched and haggard with suppressed emotion; and perhaps at that moment she realised a little nearer truth the struggle that was going forward in his heart.

Grey met her upraised eyes with his yearning gaze, but he said nothing save to murmur the word "good-bye," as he touched her hand; and, after that one long sorrowful look, they separated.

Two days later, Mabel Foster heard that Woolcroft Hall was shut up. Many months succeeded of the most extreme monotony and dulness she had ever known, and she realised how important an element in her life the society of Lionel Grey had become. As soon as they were lost, she recognised how great his care for her had been; with what sweet observances he had surrounded her; with how much of pleasure he had supplied her; how wishes scarcely formed in her own mind had been realised. Mabel was a brave girl, though, and good; and in her new loneliness she turned herself about and strove to find consolation in employment and usefulness.

Mabel used to try not to give way to sadness, but sometimes the mood refused to be dismissed. It pressed heavily upon her one August evening, as she sat upon a low stile leading into the Hall woods, watching the sun, in gorgeous state and pomp, sink to rest. An interruption came at length in the sound of a footstep on the path behind her. Mechanically Mabel descended from her seat, to give the wayfarer free passage; and, with her back still to the wood, was languidly waiting to resume her seat, when the sounds of a long-unheard voice smote upon her ear with startling effect.

"How do you do, Miss Foster?"

Mabel started nervously at the familiar tones, and almost thought her imagination had played her a trick; but, wheeling round, perceived it was indeed Lionel Grey. Lionel Grey in the very flesh—stretching out a big hand in greeting; the tones of his voice pleasant and friendly, as she ever remembered them; his kind eyes shining down upon her with the old cordial regard. In her nervous and depressed frame of mind, the shock of thus suddenly seeing him was too much for Mabel; she gave him her hand at once in gladdest welcome, but when she tried to ask him how he was, she could not utter a word, and the next moment burst into an hysterical fit of tears.

A vain man would have construed her emotion into an indication of tender interest in himself, but Lionel Grey was not of this order. He waited quietly until Mabel had, in a measure, regained composure, and then spoke again.

"I am afraid you are not well," said he, quietly.

"Yes, I am quite well," the poor girl replied; "please forget my foolish tears. I had been thinking over a great many things, and I suppose your sudden appearance frightened me."

"You do not look well," glancing at her face, which had a pale, wan appearance, that somehow did not lessen its beauty.

"I suppose I get moped and tired, which is very silly," said Mabel, smiling faintly. It seemed quite natural to confide in him and to expect help.

"What news is there? Anything happened since I left?"

"When does anything happen here? No, you will find everything to be as it was, and as it always will be, I suppose. There is never any change," she cried, impetuously.

Grey noticed the unstrung mood, the sad face and the faint smiles, and the observation bore fruit in time. For the present he took no apparent heed, merely, in answer to her remark, going on to say quietly: "What a different verdict to most people's! The usual cry is, what a world of change we live in. May I see you safely home? I am going your way," said the young man, in conclusion.

Mabel sprang from her seat with fresh vigour in her movements, and a quarter of an hour later, when they reached the Long House, she was talking to Lionel Grey with almost her old vivacity.

Their meeting and conversation, unimportant as they seemed, had two results. The immediate and lesser consequence was that Woolcroft Hall was filled with visitors. Grey, as he walked home, recollected a remark that Mrs. Lester, a married sister of his, had made in a letter to himself received that morning. It was to the effect that they were looking for a house for a time, while theirs was undergoing repairs; and the idea now occurred to him to offer Woolcroft as a comfortable shelter in their homelessness. His proposal was promptly accepted; and in a week or two the silent Hall was overflowing with his sister's family and visitors. All this infusion of life made the

neighbourhood quite gay, and the person to profit most by the change was Mabel Foster. This was the first result; but the other and primary in importance, was that Lionel Grey, who had originally come down but for a few days on business, remained on indefinitely; he and Mabel Foster resuming their old habit of easy, intimate friendship. And he shortly began to hope that a warmer feeling was springing up in the girl's heart towards him.

Poor Lionel Grey! His faithful love and rare devotion merited reward; and it was too spiteful of Fate, that, just as there seemed a chance of his attaining it, an incident should occur to dash his new-born hopes to the ground by giving a fresh importance to Mabel's youthful engagement to Walter Keeling.

May Lester, a tall girl of fifteen, had recently come home for her holidays; and, with a fair share of learning, had brought a decided taste for theatricals. At her school she had just taken part in a French play, and, like a great many more young people, the idea of acting had taken hold upon her imagination. For some time her new fancy had to go unindulged; but at length she found an opening. With dinner a long day of rain had come to an end; but the evening remained to be disposed of with a number of guests, somewhat weary of one another after the day's confinement within doors. This was Miss May Lester's opportunity: her proposal of charades was favourably received, and although in the beginning she had to use a few persuasive arts to procure actors, she soon had a fair number of recruits mustered in the hall. Stores of old-world finery had been found in the ancient house; and, as some of her band glanced with complacency over their shoulders at their novel dress, they grew nearly as enthusiastic as Miss Lester herself in regard to the histrionic art.

A little apart from the group stood Lionel Grey, intent upon keeping watch in the direction of the staircase, being presently rewarded by the first glimpse of a lovely figure: Mabel Foster, in a quaint dress of stiff brocade, her bright hair brushed up over a cushion.

As Miss Foster came forward, she was feeling anxiously in her pocket. "My handkerchief! I can't find it," she explained to Lionel, who had advanced to meet her.

"Have you mislaid it? I'll send for one."

"No, I put mine in my pocket a minute ago," said the young lady groping afresh, as though incredulous of the void.

"It seems a capacious receptacle; can I help you to get to the bottom of it?" asked Grey, laughing.

"I can get another handkerchief, only the disappearance of this one is so odd, for I am certain I put it in. Oh!" she cried, as she plunged her hand in afresh; "I see what has happened; the silk has split around the pocket hole, and my handkerchief is within the dress." And she stretched her arm down its entire length within the hole, but without reward.

"I cannot reach to the hem; can you fish up my handkerchief?"

Lionel's angling was more successful; he quickly laid hold of the runaway handkerchief. "And here is something else! Treasure trove! What can it be?" he exclaimed, as he drew forth a large folded paper or envelope.

"Never mind," cried Mabel, impatiently, as she took possession of her handkerchief. "We are keeping everyone waiting, and May is on thorns. Let us distinguish ourselves by the most lovely acting, and—don't laugh whatever you do; not at me, at all events."

"Miss Foster, I see a second Mrs. Siddons in you."

The play was ended, and the actors, still in their masquerade dress, were receiving the compliments and criticisms of the company when Miss Foster's carriage was announced. She bade each person good-night, and slipped away to resume her own proper attire. Upon descending again, she found Lionel Grey at the foot of the stairs waiting for her; and she was struck at once by some change in his face.

"Is this thing," he asked, touching the white cloak that was wrapped about her, "warm enough?"

"Yes, quite," Mabel answered, shrinking beneath the wistful, hungry look with which Grey was regarding her.

No more conversation passed until Miss Foster was seated in the carriage, but even then Grey seemed unwilling to let her go. "You are sure you have sufficient about you? these autumn nights are chilly."

Which remark afforded him an excuse for enfolding Mabel's cloak more closely about her shoulders, his hands loitering strangely in the office. But at last he bade her good-night, and at the same moment, retaining her hand in both of his, he asked her to see him alone on the morrow. Mabel promised to be disengaged at twelve o'clock, but as she was driving off, a misgiving seized her mind.

"I hope," she murmured to herself, "he is not going to make love to me again. Poor Walter! I wonder where you are, and if you are as faithful to me as I am to you?" But she heaved a sigh as she uttered the aspiration.

Miss Foster had had no need to disturb herself as to the nature of the interview Lionel Grey had sought. The purely business character of it was manifest at once.

"Do you know," Grey inquired, after the usual greetings had been exchanged, "what the paper was we found last night?"

"The paper?" Mabel asked, at a loss to understand to what he alluded.

"The large envelope that we found in the hem of your gown in those absurd charades. Good heavens! What great events do hang upon such trifles!"

"Well! What did it contain? I never gave it a second glance."

"No? I guessed from its appearance it was something of conse-

quence, and forthwith took an opportunity of examining it," said Grey. "I knew the nature of the document last night."

"What was it, then?" asked Mabel, in tones of languid curiosity.

"I have it with me," Grey answered, adding slowly while scanning her face, as though he would read her soul there: "It is the missing will; and the purport of it is to bequeath the whole Woolcroft estate to Mr. Walter Keeling."

"The long-lost will! Impossible!" exclaimed Mabel, in simple incredulity.

The will it is, though—to my cost," Grey added, quietly to himself.

"But where has it been all this time, and how did it get there?" asked Mabel.

"It was never intentionally hid there—to do so would be the act of a lunatic. It must have got down in the same manner as your handkerchief, in mistake for pocketing, and been afterwards forgotten. That, however, does not account for its position; Miss Beauchamp must have been a very absent-minded old lady to pocket such a document at all," said Grey.

The mystery of its strange hiding-place could never now be cleared up with certainty; so Mabel gave up the problem, and her first bewildering astonishment past, she began to realise the loss and disappointment this discovery of the will must be to Lionel, and tried to express her sympathy with him.

"I am truly sorry for your loss, Mr. Grey."

"Thank you," said he, stiffly, observing her again with the same steady scrutiny that he had done when he first made the announcement of the unexpected discovery.

Mabel turned away saddened, thinking within herself: "Oh, Mammon, what a terrible canker, eating into the very hearts of men, thou provest thyself, when a noble soul like this cannot more graciously resign a few thousands, of which he has no need!"

And the man beside her was not thinking at all of the fair acres he was about to give up, but only of the total separation from her, which must be the result of the surrender. But he could look for no other sentence than banishment; so he roused himself presently, and faced his fate like a man.

"I shall place this will at once in the hands of the lawyers," said Grey. "Will you give me Mr. Keeling's address, or have Paget and Sons got it to communicate with him?"

"I don't know his address, Mr. Grey."

"Not know his address!" he exclaimed. "But you can tell me where he is to be found."

"No," Mabel said; "we were forbidden to correspond."

"He would contrive, though, to let you have some tidings of himself?" persisted the young man.

Now the omission was pointed out, Mabel began to marvel at the blank which existed between Walter Keeling and herself, and felt mortified.

"It is of no consequence," Lionel Grey went on to say, seeing the expression of her face. "Probably the lawyers have an address; and in any case he will be easily traced. You shall have the earliest and fullest information," added he, generously.

Notwithstanding Mr. Lionel Grey's security on the point, however, it was some time before Walter Keeling was found. But at length, after some months of anxiety and restlessness, news reached Mabel. One windy March morning a letter lay on the breakfast table for her, and she perceived at once that the superscription was in the handwriting of Lionel Grey. The note was very brief, with small evidence about it of the pains and thought it had cost the writer:

"My dear Miss Foster,—In response to the advertisement in the Colonial papers, Mr. Walter Keeling, with his wife, has arrived in London. The necessary legal formalities will soon be gone through; after which it is his intention, I imagine, to take possession of Woolcroft, and make it his residence in the future.

"I shall be down, though, in a few days' time, and shall then be in a position to give you more particulars. Ever yours truly,

"Lionel Grey."

"His wife! With his wife!" Fascinated, Mabel returned again and again to those words; and yet again, as though the evidence of her own eyes was to be doubted. Nothing remained to be done or discovered, but to await, with what patience she might, Lionel Grey's promised return.

Yet when Mabel did see him, it was only to learn very little further. Yes, he had seen Mr. Keeling; and a smile stole about Lionel Grey's mouth at his recollections of the interview. Few people ever alluded to Walter Keeling without smiling; his joyousness of spirit, his boyish candour were so irresistible, even in memory. Of Keeling's marriage, which was the very point on which Mabel was anxious for information, it was too embarrassing for Lionel to speak. He himself knew the whole story; for Keeling, upon an hour's acquaintance had given every detail of his life's history; but Grey did not feel it to be his duty to explain the position to the injured woman beside him. He left that engaging scapegrace, Keeling, to tell his own tale.

III.

Mr. and Mrs. Keeling had arrived and were establishing themselves comfortably at Woolcroft, their inauguration wherein they thought fit to celebrate with a dinner-party, upon an early day after their own installation in that fateful mansion. The selection of guests was worthy of the original mind of Mr. Walter Keeling. There was his ancient enemy, Mrs. Foster, as ready as of yore to speak her mind. Secondly, Mr. Foster, who as he beheld another man's daughter presiding over

the fine family plate and the well-spread table provided by the fat acres of Woolcroft, all lost to his own child by his mistaken caution, came to the conclusion that Providence had made the duties of a parent too complicated. Next, there was the deposed sovereign, Lionel Grey; present in part by necessity and in part by choice. A good many business matters remained to be adjusted after the proving of the will; Grey had used the revenues of Woolcroft, but on the other hand he had laid out large sums of money in the improvement of the estate, which expenditure in time would yield a fair return; and the late and present owners were adjusting these delicate points without much intervention of lawyers. Then of course Miss Foster had accompanied her parents; and, with the clergyman of the parish and his ill-dressed, anxious-minded wife made up the party.

And over these varied elements for social enjoyment, Mr. Walter Keeling presided with such a radiant face and brilliant flow of mirthful talk as to infect even the parson's sad wife with some of his own gay spirits; while pretty little Mrs. Keeling beamed upon him from the opposite end of the table, palpably as much in love still with her husband as though their honeymoon were not over.

When the arrival of the Keelings was in prospect, Mabel Foster had dreaded the meeting with Walter; but in the reality it was no very trying scene which was enacted in the library of the Long House upon the morning that Keeling walked over to call. Her position as a deserted, if not lovelorn, damsel had very little sting in it upon beholding that volatile, kindly-natured boy. He told Mabel forthwith the story of his fortunes since his leaving England. Naturally—as a law of his being—he had fallen into the lap of fortune: it had been his intention originally to make his way to the diamond fields; but before the day came for his leaving Cape Town, he had been thrown from his horse; and a Mr. Parkes, who, standing at his gate with his daughter, had witnessed the accident, had most benevolently caused the injured stranger to be carried into his own house where he had been nursed and cared for until his recovery was complete.

"And Fanny was so awfully good to me," wound up Mr. Walter Keeling, "that I thought the least I could do when I go round again, was to marry her; so that is how I am arrived at the dignity of a married man."

"Oh! what a way to put it! Miss Foster, never, *never* believe a word Walter says," exclaimed his youthful little wife; who, while she uttered the treason, was gazing at her husband with absolute adoration in her eyes.

"My dear, I understand exactly how it was, and what he means," said Mabel, smiling. "I knew Walter long before you ever saw him."

And then the pair had departed like a couple of happy children, leaving Mabel to marvel over her shattered idol, and to feel—though she would have held to her pledged word while life lasted—

how impossible it would have been for her in her mature womanhood to have regarded her former lover with the reverence she would wish to be able to render to her husband. Ah! if she had only known all in the days when Lionel Grey—but at that point Mabel's meditations broke off with a blush.

Since the occasion of that morning visit, Mabel had met the Keelings several times; and now it was without the slightest embarrassment that she found herself a guest within her whilom lover's doors. Lionel Grey's eyes met hers for an instant in an amused glance as they took their seats at table, after which the dinner proceeded without incident. Upon their withdrawal, all the ladies except Miss Foster gathered about the blazing fire in the drawing room; but she, resisting the warmth, the easy chairs and the social chat, hid herself apart in a wide bay window at the further end of the room. Deep in thought she never heard the gentlemen enter the room, and was only aroused by a voice speaking close at her elbow.

"Dreaming, Miss Foster?"

Mabel did not respond for a moment or two, and when she spoke it was no reply to his inquiry, but only to say in an apologetic tone: "Is it not a lovely night? I enjoy looking out."

Apparently Lionel Grey, the disturber of her meditations, thought he might also like the amusement, for he remained at her side, and together they gazed upon the dim landscape illumined only by the soft moonlight and the splendour of the stars; in the air was the solemn hush of a still night.

"A fair scene, and one grown very familiar," said Grey, at length breaking the silence.

"I feel so sorry for your loss; it must be a great disappointment to you to resign this place," said Mabel in a tone of gentle sympathy.

"I suppose no man precisely enjoys losing a part of his possessions; but I have always felt my tenure here insecure, and that we were in a manner interlopers; in my father's lifetime, though, it was simply not my concern. I am leaving to-morrow," Lionel added after a pause.

At this intelligence Mabel started painfully, and looked up into his face with wistful eyes. Seeing their expression Grey was emboldened to prefer a request.

"Will you give me one of the flowers you are wearing as a memento of our friendship? It will not be much missed by you, and to me it will be a priceless treasure."

Mabel took from her dress the whole bunch, and commenced eagerly to ransack it for the fairest blossom. "Which will you have?" she asked, unable to decide.

"*You* must select it; choose it yourself to give to me," answered Grey with a somewhat sad smile.

So after a fresh search the girl at last drew forth a half-opened rose of exquisite beauty and fragrance, and held it towards him.

"Do you know that I already have a rose that you have worn?—The first time I ever saw you," he went on to say rapidly and eagerly as he took the bud from her, "you had roses in your belt; one fell out, and I kept it. That was the beginning; now I have another—is it to be the end?"

"I do not know," whispered Mabel.

"Mabel, I will not have the rose, except you give me yourself with it," said Grey, replacing the blossom within her passive fingers. Her form trembled with agitation, but beyond that, she never stirred; neither did she speak.

"Tell me, dearest, tell me; is not my faithful love at last to meet with some reward?" he cried anew, impatient at her quiescence.

Mabel gave one glance upward, then turned away again at once; but Grey was satisfied with the reply he had read in that momentary sight of her beautiful face all dyed with happy blushes. The situation was too public for much demonstration of feeling, so Grey had to be content with gathering the girl's hands which still held the flowers, into his capacious grasp.

"At last I have all the flowers, Mabel," said Lionel after a few moments' pause; and, although he smiled tenderly his voice was not without a certain tone of anxiety. "At last I have all the flowers, but have I all your love?"

Then as a cloak is thrown aside, Mabel Foster's constraint and shyness fell from her; and, looking straight into her lover's face, she answered him:

"You know the whole history, so I need not go over it. Walter Keeling won and had my girlish fancy, but I am sure, now that I am older, that we should not have suited one another. You have indeed all, all my love."

Never after that did any jealous doubts assail Lionel Grey's mind; and it was a very happy wedding which took place with much pomp and circumstance from the Long House in the following June—when the roses bloomed.

AMONG THE WELSH.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "The Cruise of the Reserve Squadron," &c.

Bridge of Aberglaslyn.

OF all the old castles in Wales, Carnarvon is, perhaps, the most noted, though not the most beautiful. That distinction is undoubtedly reserved for Conway. There is a compactness about Conway, a beauty of design, a completeness of effect, a romantic atmosphere and appearance denied to all other Welsh castles. Carnarvon has merit in point of size, and it is beautiful as far as a mere empty shell can be so. The outer walls are standing, but most of the interior has crumbled away and disappeared—like the baseless fabric of a vision. Yet one's knowledge of the Welsh castles would be very incomplete without having seen that of Carnarvon. For this reason few people pass Carnarvon without stopping at the old town. Nor ought they to do so.

Even as the castle, the town dates back to the 13th century and the reign of Edward I. Like Conway, it was once surrounded by walls; and though the walls are less perfect than those of Conway, a great portion of them still remains. But Carnarvon has grown, has increased in wealth and prosperity, has waxed great in its little way, and there is, perhaps, more town without the walls now than within them. Yet strangely enough the parish church is quite half a mile out of the town, overlooking fields and valleys and distant hills—the Snowdon range and the Rivals amongst others; taking little account of the ways of the people who worship within its walls, and whose lives are spent away from the sound of its bell.

It is a bustling, busy town, with a mixture of new and old that presents a curious and somewhat incongruous aspect. Ancient and modern are set up in rivalry, one against the other, for ever staring each other out of countenance; a sort of Dignity and Impudence in brick and mortar; an everlasting, silent challenge to mortal combat. This is one special feature about the old town, which has nothing else upon the surface of it to excite a stranger. The old streets are narrow and not very regular, and one reaches the square with a certain sense of relief. Here the modern has it very much its own way; and in one corner is a building which attracts all new comers as a needle to the pole—needless to say that building is the post office. Its inmates, too, are of a different order from the highly-strung young lady at Bettws-y-Coed. They will take any amount of trouble for you, answer any number of questions, look up the most distant references; all with an air of politeness and civility which seems to say that it is their pleasure to do your special bidding, and that you and they, for the time being, are all the world.

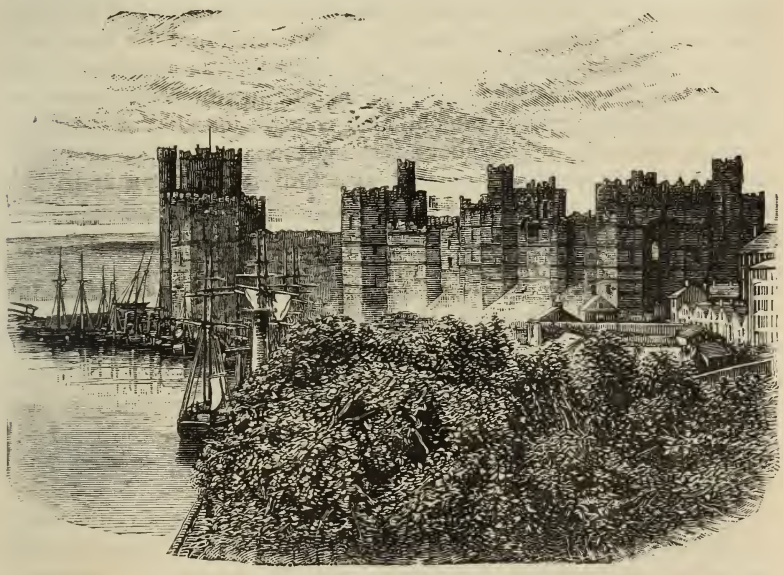
There is breathing space in this square—if it is called a square; but very possibly it is called the market place. However that may be, the form of this "square" was rather like that of South America as we trace it on the map of the world. This resembles, our early geographies used to tell us, the form of a leg of mutton, a description that may very well stand for the square at Carnarvon. The broader end, entering from the town, is to the left; and on the right, where it narrows to a finer point, your eyes glisten, your heart beats a little faster, and the organ of reverence, if you possess it in any degree of development, finds itself strongly exercised, on seeing before you the walls of the castle which have stood there for seven hundred years in all the pride and glory of youth, the sadness of decline, the poetry of decay.

The first thing that inevitably strikes you is that the town itself stands very much in the light of the castle. The principal entrance is in a narrow street, from which side nearly all beauty and dignity is lost. It is undoubtedly a building of splendid architecture, and its outer walls are almost as perfect as they were seven centuries ago. Where it has needed repair it has been well and wisely done, so that it has not lost in this way: as, for instance, some of our beautiful gothic cathedrals have lost in their restoration, where delicate tracery had fallen into decay and a beauty infinitely greater than the beauty of their youth. Carnarvon castle, massive, ponderous, built of square blocks of almost imperishable stone, bears renovating and renewing without any great loss of charm or dignity.

It stands where the river Seoint runs into the Menai Straits, and so, if bounded by the town on one side, on the other it is bounded by the expansive water. Carnarvon bay stretches out far and wide: a great sheet that is almost a sea, though yet land lies in all directions. The wooded shores on the opposite side of the river are infinitely

pretty and picturesque; and you need only be ferried across to have at once the most beautiful and romantic view of the castle it is possible to obtain.

The river is full of shipping, and the quay between the castle and the water is a scene of bustle and work. It is covered with slates which have come down from the quarries, and men are tallying, stacking, conveying from one spot to another, sending forth into the outer world. A scene of excitement, men shouting, singing, talking, and occasionally using hard words as a number of tiles, pitched from one hand to another, misses its aim and falls crashing to the earth. All this seems out of keeping with the hoary walls in the background,



CARNARVON CASTLE.

yet is far less so than the other side, where the Castle is smothered and suffocated by ugly, obtrusive houses, whom nobody wants, and which look small and despicable by the side of this grand and ancient fortress. One had almost said here again was Dignity and Impudence; but it is not so; the contrast is beyond all comparison.

From the slate-yard the scene is altogether different. The work going on, the constant movement, does not take from the beauty and effect of the walls and towers. Rather it all seems to give life and animation to a dead past. Not a galvanised semblance of life either, but actual, breathing existence. It was full of this beauty the first evening I saw it. Beyond the castle the waters of Carnarvon bay were flushed with a glow of fire. The sun was sinking in the west, and after his disappearance came that long line of wonderful light between

the clouds, stretching, as it seemed, all across the horizon, and suggesting the glory of a celestial city. The trees of the opposite shore, tipped with gold, waved and rustled in the evening breeze. A ferryman, sculling across in his clumsy boat disturbed the surface of the water into a myriad rings and flashes. "Only a halfpenny, sir," he said, in answer to a look which he interpreted into a question. "But I'll take you across and bring you back for nothing." And who could resist such an appeal—or meanly accept it? His honest face was a thorough Welsh type, as I thought at a first glance, but of the better sort—for there are good and bad amongst the Welsh, just as there are among other races. He was not the usual ferryman, as it turned out, but a sort of deputy doing duty for the day, and perhaps this accounted for his generous offer: he would not be there to-morrow and was anxious to make hay whilst the sun shone. It was not shining now, for it had just dipped, but there was all the lovely afterglow. And perhaps the old man thought that if this stranger, who was evidently lurking about, seeking the new and the beautiful and the unusual, would only give him a turn, it might result in his afterglow of halfpence; an aftermath; a gleaning and gathering up of fragments at the end of his legitimate day's work. Thus I argued, and found that I did him injustice.

"You offer to take me over for nothing," I said; "yet you are a Welshman and your people have the character of looking closely after the loaves and fishes. Do they deserve it?"

"Perhaps they do, sir," he answered, with a quiet smile, "and perhaps they don't. I expect they deserve it just as much as the English, or any other nation ever I heard of, take one with another. My idea is that all nations are more or less alike."

"You know something of them all, then?"

"No, sir. Never in my life was ten miles away from Carnarvon, except once, when I went up to London for a week with my old woman—though she wasn't old then. But I'm close upon four score, and I've thought a deal, and read a deal, and I believe we're all alike. If the Welsh are bad in one way, they make up for it in another, and it's likewise with other nations. We all come of the same stock, sir, and we all go the same way. Leastways, as the wise man says, one event happeneth to us all. I think, sir, the difference lies in language and climate; we're much the same at heart all round."

Here indeed was a philosopher in a ferry boat, a meeting of extremes. I hinted as much to him, but, philosopher still, he would not see it.

"I don't know why," he returned. "The world is full of extremes, Adam was a gardener, and we know, sir, WHO was a carpenter," with a touch of his cap and a reverential look it was pleasant to see in this old man, whose white hairs must have become the glory of his head many a long year ago. "Man honours labour, and not

labour man. When I was younger, I used to work at the slates, but I never swore, and, what's more, I never let anyone swear before me or crack unseemly jokes; the young ones were afraid to do it, and the old ones didn't care. And when my day's work was over I used to go home to my old woman and my supper, and get down my book, whatever it might be, and read away regularly till midnight. If the clock struck twelve in the middle of a sentence, that sentence remained unfinished till the next night."

"By which means you must have got through a good deal in the course of a long life?"

"Ay, sir; and nothing I have read ever came up to Shakespeare and old John Bunyan. I know them both pretty well by heart. And there, sir, is an illustration of what I was saying. Bunyan was only a tinker, or something like it; the king upon his throne couldn't have written such a book; and people think every bit as much of him now as if he had sat at the king's right hand all the days of his life."

There really was a strange power and intelligence about the old man; his eye had still the fire of youth, and—rare fact—when he smiled, he still showed a set of white and regular teeth. There was a refinement about his face, which possibly had been partly gained with age; but at all times it must have been singularly good-looking and uncommon: and I felt, in spite of what the old man said, that nature had done too much or too little for him: in a different station of life he might have been one of the world's teachers, a philosopher, perchance a ruler of men, or the founder of a new school.

"And do you still spend your evenings in the same way?" I said. "Go home to your wife, your supper, and your book?"

"Yes, sir; the supper and the book, but the old woman's gone. She left me five years ago, to travel the rest of the road alone." There was a melancholy in his voice, and yet a hopeful ring about it, too, as if he knew that before long the broken lives would be reunited. "We often have that long line of light in the sky," he continued, pointing to the horizon. "I don't know why, or whether it is peculiar to Carnarvon, but we do often have it, and even brighter than to-night. And I never see it without somehow feeling that she is in the midst of all that brightness, and I look and look at it until I almost see her. Of course it's all fancy—though I know that where she is there must be everlasting light—but it consoles me all the same."

"Are you altogether a Welshman?" I said, something in his face, as it grew upon me, beginning to make me doubt.

"No, sir, he answered. "Saving your presence, you made a mistake when you said I was a Welshman. I can understand it: I don't look exactly English, and so you concluded I must be Welsh. But my father was a Scotchman and my mother was a Frenchwoman, a descendant of an old Huguenot family. Yet they both settled here,

and here I was born, and here I've spent most of my days. They both died sixty years ago, when I was only nineteen years old."

Long before this we had reached the other side the river, and I was now standing on the bank, admiring the old castle walls, and the towers and turrets, which caught the reflection of the afterglow. The wonderful sight was a blending of many elements; new and old, youth and decay, the vigour of life, the sadness of death. The quay was lined with boats, not a few of them vessels of some size and tonnage, all there for purposes of trade. Stack after stack of blue slates lay upon the wharf; small sheds here and there, where business was transacted and bargains were made; railway trucks, which carried

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the slates to and fro. Before the Castle, the waters of the straits and the river met and kissed each other, all flowing out into the wide waters of the bay.

> The fountains mingle with the river,
> And the rivers with the ocean;
> The winds of heaven mix for ever
> With a sweet emotion!"

It was so this evening. Earth and air and sky all seemed blended together, all harmonised. Numberless little pennants from the mast heads fluttered in the breeze, which again murmured and rustled in the trees behind me. The afterglow, to which I have alluded so often simply because it was so palpable, and tinged everything with a rich

and glorious colour, rare and unearthly, seemed to shift and move under the influence of the soft and gentle wind. It was truly "a sweet emotion," and the old man in the boat, now silent and contemplative, seemed to enter into and realise all its beauty. I shall always owe Carnarvon and Carnarvon Castle a debt of gratitude for the experience of that evening, in which the old boatman bears no small part. One might have gone there three hundred and sixty four evenings out of the three hundred and sixty five, and not have met with it: nor have found my philosopher, for, "I was not here yesterday, and I shall not be here to-morrow," he said. "Indeed, I hardly know why I'm here to-day; but the ferryman was not very well, and

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on the spur of the moment I said I'd do his work for him; a day's rest indoors would put him right. And so, sir," concluded the old man as we parted with a hand shake, and an entente cordiale, "I don't suppose we shall meet again. My sun has nearly set, and it won't rise again in this world like yonder sun that has just gone down; and you, sir, are in the front of the battle, a long day before you, if it's God's will, and a hard fight; and, I think we can't do better than wish each other God speed."

So we parted, and he went his way and I went mine.

The exterior of Carnarvon is so perfect that one enters with a feeling of surprise and disappointment to find it little more than a shell within: a great bare space of nearly three acres of ground, with crumbling walls and half-gone steps, and loopholes letting in daylight, and windows dismantled. Here, entering a tower, you look down

into a deep dark cavernous hole which may be a well, or may have been a dungeon in those days long dead and gone. Or, looking upwards and aspiring, you may climb a restored staircase and reach the top of the turret, and gaze out upon a wonderful sight.

The town, one now sees, lies very much in a hollow. Many parts of it from this coign of vantage are conspicuously old and picturesque, blending more harmoniously with the new from this distance, which lends enchantment to the view. We are almost on a level with the top of yonder spire, and the rooks and the pigeons cling to its summit, and look down upon us with a strange and surprised look, evidently wondering how we managed to climb that giddy height above the world, and had the audacity to reach their own province. They blink and gaze and croak, and are certainly in an uncomfortable state of mind.

The view around is very lovely. We trace the windings of the river, the far stretching Menai Straits, the bay of Carnarvon, expanding almost to a sea. On the other side we gaze upon fertile valleys and wooded undulations, with here and there a large house reposing in stately manner "amidst ancestral elms." Beyond all, far-off hills rise massively in long and divers chains. That white road which skirts the parish church leads to Llanberis, its lakes and quarries, its grand and gloomy pass. Not the least attractive feature of the whole is the river at the foot of this old castle, with its life and shipping, and the slate wharf, where the men are at work, all apparently very happy and contented, just as if each individual man amongst them had not to bear about him his own "burden of sorrow." But—happily for them—the greater number—on whom the responsibilities of the world have not fallen—are recompensed by having very little experience of the "weight and woe" of life's errand. Their life passes as an April day, its showers soon over and quickly forgotten, and the impression left behind is, for the most part, one of sunshine.

I started one morning for a long drive, hardly knowing whither it would lead or where it would end. The day was before us and one might return at any hour. It is not one of the least charms of North Wales—I have said it before—this uncertainty of time and place; this wandering at will; this sudden turning to the left when one had meant to turn to the right. There are so many spots worth seeing, all within a narrow radius; so many ways leading to many goals.

We took the road for Llanberis. Up through the town, on to the South-America-like "square," and straight past the post-office on to the high road, leaving the town behind us. On the right, at some distance, were the Rivals, the ends of two chains of hills which here everlastingly confront each other in perpetual jealousy and challenge. Before us were the mountains of Llanberis, one of which rejoices in the name of Elidyr fach. It was a grand chain, and we seemed to be making for its very heart. Presently we crossed the railway, and the

river, which flows from Llanberis Lake down past the old walls of the Castle, to be lost in the waters of the Menai Straits.

The driver was a capital man, not given to trances and monosyllables. He knew by heart all the neighbourhood, was enterprising and ready to go whithersoever one listed. To be met half way in suggestions and proposals both helps one's decisions and increases one's pleasure.

Passing through a small village or hamlet of houses chiefly inhabited by the Llanberis quarrymen, the greater beauty of the drive began. Hills on either hand, wild and rocky, and really grand and impressive beyond any I had yet seen in Wales. High hills, presenting a jagged, uneven surface, yet so diversified as to be almost more beautiful than wooded slopes. Here eagles ought to soar and the vulture build its nest. Great pieces of rock lay in fragments along the road side. Presently we came to the lakes where the hills found their reflection. Calm, cold, deep-looking pools, silent and solitary, not a bird to break the stillness, or cleave the air, or send its melancholy cry across the water. To suddenly plunge into these mountain recesses, grand, wild, and beautiful as they were, was a startling contrast to the first part of the drive, which for four or five miles had been destitute of any striking feature.

The small town or village of Llanberis was quiet to-day, and we passed quickly through on to the hotel, where not very many days before we had halted especially for the sake of our maimed horse. Then we had approached it from Bettws-y-Coed; now we entered from Carnarvon, and the opposite direction. The roses still bloomed in the garden of the hotel, which, we felt more than ever, was in every way a pleasant contrast to the Victoria at Carnarvon, though owned by the same proprietor and bearing the same name. The managers were so much more civil and obliging, so glad to see you again, so anxious to do all in their power to make your stay, long or short, agreeable.

Here, to-day, we halted just long enough for a midday meal, and then started onwards for our next destination—the grave of Gelert.

Once more we saw the quarries of Llanberis, where the men, like flies upon a wall, were at work. Every now and then, blasting echoed and thundered amongst the hills, and broken slate refuse ran down the sides with the noise of an Egyptian hail-storm. Again we entered the grand and gloomy pass, with its frowning heights barren of all verdure. But there was more water to-day in the small cataracts that found their way down from the mountain tops; much rain had fallen and swelled the torrents. Again we passed the cottage which had been our refuge that disastrous afternoon. The old woman was at her door, and we greeted her as one ought to greet all those who stretch out a helping hand to their fellows in times of distress. But the good woman was aged; I believe I remarked that

she might have been a hundred, and she looked it to-day. Either sight or memory failed her; or, perhaps, it was something of both; and we felt that it was excusable. Besides, the obligation had been on our side; we had been the recipients of her favour; it was for us to remember.

Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude!
* * * *
Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
Thou dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot

The old boatman, if he knew Shakespeare by heart, might have quoted these words. We at any rate would not forget our benefits, and we heartily greeted the old woman. Slow remembrance would dawn upon her, and by-and-bye, sitting in her chimney corner, she would have a vision of days ago, and pails and hot water, and almost shipwrecked travellers; would associate it with him who had to-day stopped and thanked her in his best English—as intelligible as Greek to the good old soul.

On we went through this gloomy and desolate pass, on and on, until we reached the summit, and presently turned to the right, and looked for the splendid view into Nant Francon, which had so impressed us that eventful by-gone day. Alas, we knew we should see it not. We were now enveloped in a thick, cold, wet mist, which had crept over the summit, and chilled and wet us to the bone. Nothing more unpleasant and unsatisfactory could be imagined, and we almost began to repent that we had not turned backwards at Llanberis, and left Beddgelert for a happier occasion.

We had now entered Nant Gwynant, or the Vale of Waters, and truly it was well named. Rather to us was it a Vale of Tears, for the cold wind and the soaking mist caused us involuntarily to shed them. The grand Snowdon range of hills, the beautiful and fertile valley of Nant Francon—all was swallowed up in mist. We watched for mist wraiths, but though in a haunted valley—as the reader shall hear presently—we saw them not. But in such a rush of wind and wet, even mist wraiths would hardly venture abroad.

Luckily for us it did not last. The road descended sharply, and before we had reached the level of the valley, we had left the mist behind us. We were wet through and through, as far as our outer coats were concerned, but it was everything to be out of that fearful fog, where one felt blinded, and lost, and altogether wretched.

It was a very pleasant road on which we now travelled. The valley to our right; to our left, wooded slopes, with houses charmingly situated at intervals, most of which, the driver said, were let for the summer and autumn months. Pleasanter and more rural retreats, affording both fishing and shooting, could hardly be desired.

On we went, under a grey sky but a clear atmosphere, until at length we reached the village of Beddgelert. It looked wonderfully old, the cottages built of that dull grey stone which is always more or less melancholy. But here the extreme beauty of the surrounding country forbade all gloom. It struck me as being the most beautiful spot in all Wales, affording one all the emotions of yet greater and grander and more distant scenes. On looking back, I still think that no part of Wales I know of can quite approach this spot; this, and the walk through the Pass of Aberglaslyn.

We rumbled over the old bridge and soon reached the Royal Goat Hotel, which stands well in the midst of the plain, away from the

Pass of Aberglaslyn.

village, surrounded by the grand hills, and in full view of Snowdon. Here great coats were divested, and consigned to warmer regions, and Jehu, having put up his horse, led the way to Gelert's grave.

Everyone knows the sad story, which drew forth all our childish sympathies, and all our childish sorrow in the days of nursery rhymes and fairy tales. How the sad fate of Gelert was too great an anguish to be tolerated, and one had to take refuge in unbelief. However that may be—whether true or not—there under the shadow of a loving and protecting tree, surrounded by a railing, is the small mound that is said to hold the body of the faithful Gelert. If it does nothing else, it certainly throws a halo of singular romance over this valley, already so rich in beauty that it seems to need no other attractions than those nature has bestowed upon it. The grave stands in the centre of the

solemn plain, therefore in its most open part. The river rushes through the valley, frothing over its rocky bed, at times so shallow that you wonder how the fish live, and where they hide themselves. All around, great hills look down upon the little mound as if they would shelter it from the cold winter winds. To-day all was peaceful and calm and quiet, no one visible but a couple of fishermen whipping the stream. A little way off was the village, some of its houses turned towards the water, and overlooking it in picturesque and romantic fashion, giving somewhat of life and animation where all else was still nature, grand and beautiful, but eternally silent and immovable. Those great hills and mountains always seem to bear within them the weight and woe of a world, the secrets of nature; they are calm, upright in their integrity, ever the same, and appear to be for ever reading a solemn lesson and warning to those who can understand the interpretation thereof.

We struck back from Gelert's grave on to the road, and went down the Pass of Aberglaslyn as far as the old bridge. I have said that nothing in Wales, as far as my experience goes, is grander or finer than this. I saw nothing half so beautiful—except the Valley of the Eden. The grandeur and ruggedness of the Pass of Llanberis is not to be compared with the beauty of that of Aberglaslyn. Advancing along the road, the hills on either side tower above you, covered, for the most part, with a wealth of trees and rustling foliage. The pass narrows more and more, and as the road winds, the hills seem to meet in front of you. There is just room for the road and the river, which rushes and roars on its way, over great stones and boulders. Trees overhang the banks and kiss the water. Scattered here and there on those hills which are not wooded are little white sheep looking like patches of snow in apparently inaccessible nooks. Presently a last winding opens up the bridge, where the beauty of the pass seems to culminate. Old and grey and moss grown, a wealth of trees and brambles and ferns, above it and below it and all around, it spans the water with its one round arch. It is a most lovely and romantic spot, the delight of artists from time immemorial, who have even planted themselves in the very middle of the stream for the sake of sketching from an effective point of view.

We had not much time to waste now in fervent admiration. The day was already far spent, and we had still a long journey before us ere Carnarvon would again receive us. So we hastened back towards the inn, and on our way met a policeman and a woman, who laughingly told us with Welsh freedom that she was in charge and on her way to gaol—a statement that was evidently a libel upon her character. Before long we were once more on the road ourselves. The latter end of the day was better than the beginning. Clouds broke and the sun came out in gleams, and a red light broke in the west. It was a long drive, through a somewhat wild and barren valley, but possessing something especially pleasant and exhilarating.

A few farms were dotted about, and in the fields a great number of Welsh cattle were grazing, many of them gathered into restless groups at the gates, waiting to be milked. We passed a rock that bore some resemblance to the head of Pitt, close by the pathway leading to the ascent of Snowdon. The mountain towered on our right, but for the most part shrouded in cloudland. Then we passed an inn called the Snowdon Range, where people often put up for fishing in the long lake that we came to soon after.

Presently we passed a spot that the coachman said had once held a haunted house. It was desolate and gloomy, dark with a cluster of trees, in which, said Jehu, the house once stood. Tenant after tenant took it and had to leave it; no one could possibly live there; and at last it became so marked and notorious that it was razed to the ground. If another house were now built upon the site of the old one, it would be a curious problem to discover whether it, too, would be haunted.

We left behind us this gloomy spot, doubly so in the gathering shades of night. The horse went bravely on, as brisk and fresh, apparently, as though he could cheerfully go through another forty miles before settling down for the night. We could not say as much; and presently when we passed away from the hills into more open country, we were glad to see, though still in the distance, the lights of Carnarvon, reposing like a handful of glow-worms in a hollow. The flush in the west still lingered, though it was now quite dark overhead. A cold wind was blowing across the valley, and we urged on our willing steed. The lights drew nearer and nearer, and presently we found ourselves in the square, passing the post office, under the very shadow of the old castle walls. Down through the long street of the town, catching a glimpse of the Guildhall on our left, which has been built over one of the old gateways, and now presents a most singular and nondescript appearance, and in a few moments we had reached the inn and found shelter. Here I delivered over my great coat, which was still wet through, and received a promise that it should be dry by the morning; but with an indifference to the comfort of travellers which seems rather characteristic of the place, the next morning it was returned quite as wet and rather more stiff than it had been the night before.

When that next morning came, I took an early leave of Carnarvon. The first portion of the drive lay over the road we had travelled yesterday. Past the haunted house, through the barren yet pleasant valley, down the valley of Beddgelert, through the Pass of Aberglaslyn to the old bridge. Beyond this it was new country, full of beauty. A wide-spreading valley, through which ran the river Colwyn—the valley of Festiniog on the left, considered by many the most beautiful in all Wales. Far off hills, range after range, bounded the view. On our right, richly-wooded slopes, and trees overhanging, and here and there overarching, the road. So diversified were the hills that

the scene was constantly changing, each new aspect and feature apparently more beautiful than the last.

Then all this beauty seemed to vanish as we entered the small, singularly ugly town of Tremadoc, with rows of gloomy workmen's cottages that looked more forbidding than prison walls, and almost cast a shadow upon the lovely surrounding hills. This quickly gave place to its sister town of Portmadoc, scarcely more attractive, but more active and bustling. The harbour was crowded with shipping; we had passed from a world of dream and romance into the prosy atmosphere of business, a contrast which somehow always gives one a shock and shiver. And no wonder. Surrounded by all the beauties of nature, grand mountains and laughing valleys, running streams and waving forests, blue skies and warm sunshine, we breathe an atmosphere of heaven and surely enjoy a foretaste thereof. The contrast of a place given over to hard work, to sale and barter, haunted by the lives of men whose highest aim and ambition is to make both ends meet at the year's end—a state of things beyond the control of most of them—is depressing enough to overshadow the most sunny temperament, if it happens to be keenly alive to such impressions.

At Portmadoc our drive came to an end. The train stood at the platform, and before many minutes had passed was speeding on its way to Barmouth.

CONCERNING LOVE.

"Sing us a song of love." "How would have me tell,
In but a song, of that which is most of life?
Of that which surely comes, so soon as the heart is rife,
Comes, as surely as sound comes to the well-cast bell.

"And, as the bell, if rung by a careless hand,
Breaks and will ring no more, though the rift be small,
So breaks the heart if, with too fast a fall,
Crushed are its hopes and scattered as foam on the strand.

"And, as the bell no cunning can mend again,
And but the furnace remains to effect a cure,
So with the heart it has often been proved as sure:
Once broken, 'tis death alone that can ease its pain."

Lena Milman.

AN OCCULT SCIENCE.

IT was dear old Aunt Judith who first instigated me to attempt an account of one year of my life, which, though it contained more uncertainty, more thought, and more unhappiness than any other, is nevertheless that for which I have always been most thankful, and to which I am fondest of looking back.

I was engaged to Ernest Crofts, and had been so for six months. We were to be married in the summer, by which time Ernest assured my father that he would have a sufficient competency upon which to marry. I then thought I was very fond of him; probably in a way I was. I admired him; he was better-looking, and had a more distinguished air than anyone in the village. Even young Walter Fardyce, who was articled to old Mr. Welsh, fell into the background on occasions when Ernest came down for a day or two; and it was not without pride that I noticed the unmistakable looks of admiration cast upon him as we walked up the aisle of the church on Sunday, and reflected that it was just to see *me* that he had torn himself away from the many attractions of London, and come to spend his Sunday in quiet Stokebourne. Ernest was "in the City." He had to sit in an office a great part of the day; but he assured me that his work was very different from what it had been. He was in a much better position than formerly; held a responsible and trusted post, and had the management of considerable sums of money.

That was about all that I knew of him. My father had made all necessary inquiries when we were first engaged, and my duty was not so much to inquire how he obtained his income, as to study the way in which I was to manage it best.

There was considerable excitement in the village that winter. Old Dr. Williams had died at Christmas, and everybody was naturally much exercised about his successor. We had heard vague rumours concerning Dr. Browne, who, it was stated, had made all necessary arrangements about the purchase of the practice. It was quite certain that a stranger had been down to see old Mrs. Williams, and Walter Fardyce had put on a very knowing and mysterious look when questioned about him. From all accounts Dr. Browne was a wonderful man; had been abroad a great deal. Some said in India, others were sure it was California, and deaf old Miss Sedgewick, who somehow or other always managed to hear most things, assured me it was Egypt. Walter Fardyce committed himself to the statement that he was leaving a good practice in London, in order to obtain greater leisure for his scientific studies than was possible in the metropolis. I wondered at this, for, from all I had heard from Ernest, it seemed

to me that no place could be so desirable for a residence as London. In comparison with it Stokebourne was a mere desert.

I remember well the first time I spoke to Dr. Browne. There was a party at the Welshes', and Ernest was present. He had certainly made a great favour of it, for he hated these "rustic festivities," as he was pleased to call them, but supposed it would be as well to accept sometimes. Besides, I had begged him to come.

I suppose the Stokebourne parties were very dull; Ernest said so; but I had never been to any others, and felt that I was no competent judge. There was a bagatelle board in the hall at Mr. Welsh's, and some of the younger guests generally amused themselves there. Ernest despised it, but that was no wonder, for in London he was in the habit of playing billiards. In the drawing-room four of the elders played whist, and a round game of cards was organised at the large table. In addition to this there was a piano in the room, and one after another, everybody with the least pretensions to musical ability, was called upon to do his or her little utmost for the entertainment of the assembly. I never quite saw why, for nobody listened, and with the exception of the whist players, who undoubtedly hated the music, everybody talked.

Dr. Browne arrived late. He had been called out to a patient and detained longer than he had expected to be, and there was quite a flutter when he made his appearance. I had just been singing, with Ernest to turn over for me, and we were standing in the hall watching the balls running round the end of the board, instead of going into the nine hole as the player wished. The doctor was not handsome, certainly. I glanced at Ernest as I made this mental comment, and the sight of his features strengthened my opinion. But handsome or not, I felt sure that not even my lover could have been more self-possessed on entering the room, or made his apologies to Mrs. Welsh in better turned sentences.

The game of bagatelle came to an end. Dr. Browne expressed his willingness to do anything that was desired of him, and I soon found that I was to play on one side with Ernest, against Annie Welsh and the new-comer. Was he young or old? That was a question difficult to decide. I had heard Miss Sedgewick speak of him as "our young doctor," but that was probably in comparison with Dr. Williams, who had died at the age of seventy. Walter Fardyce jocularly spoke of him as "old Browne," and I could see that his forehead was wrinkled and that he was slightly bald. He did not talk much at first, but seemed to be noticing everything around him with an amused smile on his face. There was, however, one thing that struck me, and that was that whenever Ernest placed his hand on the edge of the board, or on the back of a chair, he always gazed at it intently, and then slightly frowned, as if dissatisfied with something. I had always thought Ernest's hands rather nice; they were whiter and softer than most men's. I heard Dr. Browne ask Annie Welsh who he was;

and soon after we went in to supper, changing partners at Annie's suggestion.

I wore mittens. The doctor observed it, and soon I became aware that he was endeavouring to make me remove them. He suggested that the knife and fork might injure them; also that the room was hot, and that I should be more comfortable without them. This troubled me; I preferred to keep my mittens on, and found myself hiding my hands in my lap as much as I could. He managed to get Ernest to pass him a good many things, and scrutinised his hands carefully as he did so. I was glad when supper was over and I escaped to the drawing-room. The doctor's earnest investigations oppressed me. But there was no getting very far away from him; he followed me, and I saw his face light up as he noticed the piano.

"You sing, Miss Fox, I am sure," he said. "Will you not give us the pleasure?"

"I have brought only two songs," I stammered, "and I have already sung them."

"I don't believe anyone will notice if you repeat one; please do."

"I would much ——" But here Mr. Welsh came up, to say that they were getting up a game of "person and thing;" would we play? I consented only too readily, and the doctor was baffled once more.

Of course, as was unavoidable in Stokebourne, there was always a superabundance of ladies at parties, but this fact was never openly admitted. The subject was scrupulously avoided, and on occasions when "person and thing" was the game selected, it was carried out quite as though there had been an equal supply of both sexes. Gentleman and lady always went out together, and when every gentleman had had his turn, someone suggested that the amusement should be changed. Preference was always given to the older ladies or more honoured guests, so I was not at all surprised to find myself passed over. To be sure, I should have liked to have gone out with Ernest, but there was always a sort of innate modesty in Stokebourne with regard to engaged couples, and I had feared a tête-à-tête with the doctor.

Ernest yawned all the way home and pronounced himself fearfully bored. In dutiful sympathy I also tried to imagine myself so, but couldn't. I kept thinking of Dr. Browne's expressive face, and wondering what was passing through his mind. Ernest's thoughts were evidently much on the same track.

"And the worst of all, Trixy," he muttered, "was that confounded doctor, with his sharp eyes for ever taking stock of your paws. Can't make it out. His are nothing to boast of."

The winter wore on. I had a great many letters from Ernest and wrote a great many to him. He was getting on splendidly, he said, and wrote enthusiastically about next summer.

My father was fond of scientific subjects, and had struck up quite a

friendship with the new doctor, who would often come over to our house in the evening and have a chat and a smoke. I rarely saw him unless I happened to come across him as he passed in or out; he sat in the study with my father. One evening, however, I had to go in about the weekly tradesmen's books and found the doctor there. I had not known he was in the house, or perhaps should not have ventured near the study.

"Sit down, Trixy," said my father. "Dr. Browne has been telling me most interesting facts with regard to electricity; I'm sure you would like to hear them also."

I obeyed and soon forgot my dread of the man in listening to his grave, sweet voice as he simply explained many things hitherto unknown to me. There was a fascination about him. I watched the large, firm mouth, deep-set eyes, and short projecting nose, and could not find the face so plain as I had imagined it. He rambled on and on; I sank down into the recesses of the arm-chair before the fire listening with all my ears and hardly able to take my eyes off him. Electricity gave way to other subjects all equally interesting, and all equally well understood by the doctor, it would appear.

"They are curiously superstitious and yet intelligent people," he said of the Egyptians. "I have picked up many strange things from them. Do you know anything of palmistry, Mr. Fox?"

My father shook his head and I felt myself getting hot.

"Many people know a little," he continued. "There are certain points connected with character to which common credence is given. It is generally admitted that there are hands whom no one should trust."

He dropped his voice and his eye-lids as he spoke, but I felt that he was looking at me, and I hid my own hands hurriedly under my apron.

My father rose and went to the book-case and took down a packet of pamphlets.

"There's something about it in one of these," he said. "I've had it for years."

"There are a great many systems," resumed the Doctor. "They vary much in the details, but in the main I believe them to be the same."

My father stretched out his hand towards him smiling.

"Can you tell me anything about that?" he asked.

"It's rather old and worn for character," replied Doctor Browne, "and you surely have no need of a gipsy. At your age, one would say your fortune was made."

"Come, Trixy," exclaimed my father; "let us hear the sage expound. Put out your hands."

"Miss Fox will suit my purpose to perfection," said the Doctor, bowing with mock gallantry. "It is the privilege of an old bachelor, I believe, to interest himself in the future welfare of young people

about to take an important step in life. At any rate, it is a special fad of mine. The sympathy of hands—you understand, Mr. Fox?"

My father did not understand; he was totally ignorant of the subject.

"I fancy few people would agree with me," continued Doctor Browne, "but I firmly believe that a wider knowledge of the matter would be of practical utility. At the same time, ignorance of these signs saves the dread of approaching unhappiness: for there always must be a want of sympathy between people when there exists an utter dissimilarity in the fundamental formation of their hands. It is my hobby," turning towards me with a grave smile. "I fear I annoyed Mr. Crofts the first time we met. It was indiscreet, I admit; but you were the only engaged people present, were you not?"

He stretched out his hand to receive mine for inspection. I drew back.

"Nonsense!" said my father; and I was obliged to obey.

Dr. Browne took my hand. His was a firm, strong hand, rather fleshy; a somewhat clumsy hand to look at, though the large fingers were lissom enough. He noticed a few things about mine; then suddenly, with a start, let it drop, rose, and walked towards the book-case.

"It's rather an ordinary hand," he stammered; "there isn't much to say. And it's getting late, I think; I must be off. Good night." He took his hat and was gone.

I was terribly troubled that night. The only conclusion I could arrive at was that the *false* hand he spoke of was mine; that he had suspected it from the beginning, and was now convinced of it. I could get no rest; I was miserable. Towards morning, I sneaked down to the study, and seizing the packet of pamphlets, flew upstairs again.

But I could make nothing of the matter. I studied my hand carefully, according to the instructions given, but found nothing that should have caused the Doctor to start. My failure made me more wretched still.

Several days passed without my seeing Dr. Browne. I was glad, for I somewhat resented what I imagined to be his unfair judgment. But one dull afternoon as I entered our back gate and was proceeding across the garden, I ran against him leaving the house. I attempted to pass on with a bow and an exchange of "good evenings," but he detained me.

"Miss Fox," he said," I frightened you the other night; let me explain myself."

"It's of no consequence," I replied. "Smooth down the fact as much as you will, you have nevertheless tacitly admitted the existence of an odious characteristic in me."

"You mistake," he cried; "I feared it. The untrustworthy hand does not belong to *you;* never could with those fingers."

"Then to whom?" I asked.

"We did not allot it to anyone, if I remember rightly. I brought it forward as an example." But I thought he seemed embarrassed as he spoke.

"Then what is there in mine that you would not tell?" I demanded. "Surely I may know."

He paused.

"There was the absence of something I feared to find, and the presence of something I hoped for, yet hardly dared hope for, and the finding of which I now fear."

I shuddered as he took my hand in his and gazed very earnestly into my face. I could not meet those grave, almost sad, penetrating eyes. Then he sighed and turned away.

"It's all rubbish, your palmistry," I cried, as nervous tears started to my eyes. "I looked about my hand in a book, and found nothing to fear."

"You are probably right," he rejoined. "You do well not to be superstitious."

Ernest was very busy at this time, and did not get away from the City so frequently as formerly. It was Spring now, and with its beautiful promise of joyful Summer, I felt cheered, for did I not imagine that my happiness was approaching with it?

Dr. Browne came and went; we were good friends, we spoke when we met, but carefully avoided the subject of hands. I used to wish he would not look at me so intently; it almost frightened me; and yet the better I knew him, the less there seemed in him to fear. His kindness and gentleness had gained him the hearts of all his patients, and there was something about him that seemed to impress one with the certainty of his great sincerity and trustworthiness.

It was May: Ernest and I were to be married towards the end of June. I had been receiving daily letters from him all the winter and now two days had passed and I heard nothing. I was anxious, yet would not allow myself to be so; he was specially busy that was all; and there was another delivery at eleven o'clock. I sat in the drawing-room, looking along the road, till I saw the postman appear. He was walking on the opposite side till he approached our house, when I saw him cross and make straight for our gate. His hand was raised to open it, I was jumping up to run to the door, when a man dashed along the street and prevented him, a few words were exchanged—and the postman passed on. The man was Dr. Browne.

I was petrified.

"Wretch," I muttered, between my teeth, "who now has proved himself the owner of the false hand!"

I paced the room in a fever of indecision, then began to review the state of things and decide upon a plan of action. A maid disturbed me thus occupied; my father had sent for me in his study. I went

down. He was walking about the room, an unusual thing with him, and I could see he was agitated.

"Well, Trixy," he began, with an assumed smile, "I have something to say to you. I was just thinking you have not seen Aunt Judith lately; I hear she is not well; now what do you say to paying her a visit of a week or two?"

"Papa," I cried, "what do you mean? I am so busy preparing. You forget *it* is to come off in five weeks."

He walked away towards the other side of the room. "No, child," he continued, with a forced laugh. "You cannot imagine I have forgotten that; but you see, it is just on that account that I want you to go; married women are not free to go visiting. Come, my dear, sewing will progress all the better with good Aunt Judith to help. Be prepared to start at three o'clock, and I will drive you to the Junction. Don't bother about the house; you'd better not go out—I think perhaps it may rain," he feebly added. "Now then, off with you!"

He kissed me, and I knew that there was nothing left but to obey. I have very good ears, and I am certain that I heard my father speaking to the servant as I went up the stairs: he was telling her to admit no one till I was gone.

Aunt Judith was my mother's sister, and lived in a bijou residence at Denmark Hill. She always has been and still is my ideal of an old lady. She received me warmly and I thought almost unnecessarily kindly, fussing about me a good deal and looking at me most sadly. The evening was chilly; we sat together in the pretty drawing-room with its wealth of knick-knacks and I felt as though I must do something to occupy myself.

"Where is the paper," Aunt Judith? I asked. "I haven't seen it to-day."

"Never mind the paper," said Aunt Judith, looking anxious; "it is upstairs. Take Harper's; you don't see it at Stokebourne."

"No, Aunt Judith," I exclaimed. "Why am I not to see the paper, and why have I been hustled off here in this unceremonious manner? What does it all mean? There is something that is being kept from me." For it suddenly flashed upon me that for some reason or other the postman had not been allowed to leave the paper as usual by the eleven o'clock delivery.

Aunt Judith came and put her arms round me.

"My dear," she whispered, "I hoped to wait till to-morrow. Your father sent you here because he had no courage;—it always was John's way," she added.

I soon learnt all about it. Ernest had disappeared and there were considerable discrepancies discovered between the cash in hand and the cash that should be accounted for. The books had been tampered with to no small extent, and the fraud had been going on for some time. Hints were dropped about fast companions and too much billiard playing.

Aunt Judith glossed over these crimes to the best of her ability, still clinging to the hope that there might be some mistake, and I stayed on and stayed on with her, going about like one in a hopeless dream. I felt thankful to my father for sending me away; I could not have borne to have seen the home faces around me in my sorrow.

The summer passed—a dreary summer to me. Aunt Judith took me to Folkestone for a month, and while we were there we heard that Ernest was reported to have been seen in America. He had run away and there was no longer any hope of his righting himself in England.

In September I returned to Stokebourne. My father met me at the station, and that evening Dr. Browne came to see me. He was very kind and gentle, and smiled when I thanked him for having prevented my first learning the bare facts from the newspaper.

"That was an act of common charity, Miss Fox, and so many months ago as to be almost forgotten."

"Not by me," I replied.

We saw a good deal of him that autumn and winter, and I heard from Miss Sedgewick wonderful accounts of his endeavours to find Ernest, and if possible save him from further disaster. It was comforting to have him in the study in the evenings. I got into the way of joining him and my father there, and listening to their talk, which was always enjoyable. I liked to feel myself in the presence of such a strong, noble nature.

He came one night and my father was out. He entered the drawing-room where I was seated.

"Do you know I have been in Stokebourne a year?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied, "I remember it very well."

"You did not like me when I first came."

"I did not know you; that was the reason."

He lifted my hand. "May I explain now? you know I could not that afternoon in the garden."

I looked up into his honest face, and he smiled.

"Do not despise me for my belief, but these signs I have never known to fail."

He turned my hand palm upwards, and placed his own in the same position beside it.

"Now do you see anything exactly similar?"

"I cannot say I do," I replied, laughing; his strong hand appeared so different to my poor little weak one.

"Nevertheless it is there," and he pointed out two little lines, one on his hand and one on mine, which were certainly identical.

"But doesn't everybody have them?" I asked.

"Certainly not. May I explain their significance?"

I nodded.

"When these two lines so minutely identical are found, one on the

hand of a man, and the other on that of a woman, these two hands will surely be joined and their owners be no more parted."

"But—but," I stammered, "the book said nothing about that."

"No; it is an Egyptian superstition. I believe no other European knows of it, but it rarely, if ever, deceives. Tell me now, Beatrice, that it shall not on this occasion; let our hands remain always together."

He took my hand in his, and drew me towards him; and I felt that it must be so; that all my happiness depended on the fulfilment of that ancient superstition.

"My dear," he whispered, "you understand now why I so dreaded your marriage with Mr. Crofts, and why the discovery of what I have shown you caused me such mingled hope and fear. Those soft white hands of his! they forced themselves upon my attention from the first. I had never before met with so mean a type clothed in so fair an exterior. And he in such close connection with *you!* Ah, Beatrice, I was not then, as I now feel myself to be, a man greatly to be envied!"

THE ROSE'S PETITION.

"Oh! pluck me not," a wild rose said;
"I love to linger on the spray
Where first I reared my blushing head,
To dream the happy hours away.

"I breathe sweet fragrance on the air,
And lure the wild bee from its nest,
To sport among my golden hair,
And sip the honey from my breast.

"Then pluck me not from off the tree;
Oh! do not shorten by one hour
The life that now remains to me,
A beautiful, but fading flower.

"'Tis true no winter chills my year,
No tempest scuds across my sky;
'Tis true I never shed a tear,
And never dream that grief is nigh.

"But mourn not that my little span
Should be one bright, unclouded day—
Nor that the years that fall to man
Should sometimes have a dash of grey!"

Walter K. Lewis.

THE THREE WISHES.

I.

SITTING under the shade of the enormous lime-tree and looking across the undulating lawns varied by groups of shrubs and beds of gay flowers, I had a pleasant view of the old red brick castle, its sturdy towers, deep-set windows, ivy-clad walls and picturesque irregularity, upon which the setting sun was flinging all the glow of his summer splendour.

Immediately around, were gardens and shrubbery. To the right the lake; on the left, half screened by a belt of magnificent trees, the village roofs, the whole framed in by a wide semicircle of well-wooded hills. "Yes," thought I to myself, "it is one of the finest places in all Hessia; and if the climate were not quite so diabolical ——"

But here my hostess made her appearance, and, with a kindly smile upon her intelligent and still lovely face, asked me what I was dreaming about all alone there, and why I had not rather accompanied the girls upon their walk.

"My dear Countess, do you suppose that three blooming maidens like your nieces care one jot for the company of an old bachelor like myself? Believe me, they are much happier running about without a watch-dog. As to your first question, I was just thinking what a beautiful place Birkenhöhe is."

"Yes, it *is* beautiful, and it often seems a dream to me that I should be its mistress. There was small promise of anything of the kind in my early days, I assure you."

"That ought to make you enjoy it the more."

"Well, yes, perhaps you are right. Did I ever tell you my history?"

"No, never."

"Well, if you'd like to know it, I have it written down. You shall have it to help you through the first rainy day."

She was as good as her word. The next day but one, I was looking disconsolately out upon the dripping shrubs and a drenched peacock, when a hand was laid upon my arm. I turned. There stood my little hostess in her eternal grey silk, a black lace scarf over her head, eyes bright as the diamonds in her ears, and her skin almost as soft and fair as if she had been sixteen instead of sixty.

"Here it is," she whispered, putting a roll of MS. into my hand. "But, please, don't let the girls get hold of it. I don't mind your reading it a bit, but ——"

A rippling little laugh completed the phrase, as, with her head

somewhat on one side, she looked knowingly up into my face. There was something bird-like about her, and even her voice had a sort of cheery chirp that won one's heart at once.

"Be quite at rest," I said; "not a soul shall be a bit the wiser."

With a trusting little nod and a bright smile she glided away, and left me to the solitary enjoyment of a cigar, an easy chair, and *The Three Wishes.*

I was born at Bonn of poor parents—began the record. My father was a cooper, while my mother used to iron and get up linen. Actual want never invaded our household, but there was little or nothing beneath our garret roof beyond the pure necessities of life. To this very hour I remember how I used to sit cowering over our poor little stove in the bitter winter days, my attention equally divided between the feeble fire as it smouldered rather than burned, and the book I held in my chilblained hand. I had a passion for reading, and a kind neighbour did what she could to keep me supplied with food for my mind, which, I now feel, would have fatally preyed upon itself, had it been unable to find sustenance. You can well imagine that the books she procured me were not always what they might have been. And yet I can conscientiously say that their perusal never did me any serious harm. I was not a romantic, but a tolerably sharp-witted girl, gifted with an excellent memory, and engaged in too close and continued a contact with the petty cares of daily life to have either time or inclination for dreaming. For if I grew in years, wants also multiplied, and it was but just and reasonable that I should try to contribute something towards the maintenance of our little household.

The many consultations upon the best means of procuring me some permanent employment were one day suddenly put an end to, by my father's coming home somewhat earlier than usual, and saying: "I have found a place for Gretchen. Herr Weisenborn will take her as waiting-maid at the Halle. No, wife, you need not look anxious; Frau Weisenborn herself told me she would take every care of her."

The establishment was the one for which my father worked as cooper, and was the best frequented if not the largest in all Bonn.

If not particularly delighted, I was not at all displeased at the intelligence. I should now see something of life, and have the opportunity of comparing real men and women with those whose acquaintance I had made in print. That part of the business delighted me; as for the rest—well, it would not do to be too fastidious.

So, with a tolerably light heart, I set out with my father early one spring morning; he carrying my poor little hair trunk upon his shoulder, I with a bundle tied up in a blue cotton handkerchief in my hand.

We had not very far to go. The "Weisenborn Bier-Halle" was

only just outside the town, and pleasantly situated amid detached houses and gardens overlooking the river. I need not describe it; establishments of the kind are all alike. A large hall for winter and inclement weather; a garden with linden trees, gravel and a mushroom-like growth of little round tables for sunshine and summer.

I was kindly received by both master and mistress, invested with the white apron and cap peculiar to serving maids, taken over the establishment, told what was expected of me, and then left to my own devices.

When my father at last left, and when I could no longer catch a glimpse of his yellow fur cap over the hedge of budding lilacs, I took refuge in a little leafless arbour, and had a good cry.

What would I not have given to feel my feet crunching over the sanded floor of our poor little room at home, and to see my pale-faced mother sitting there at the single window with the eternal basket of linen beside her? But there was no room for sentiment in the heart of a girl whose path of duty lay amid an army of tankards and a thirsty public. So up I jumped, dried my tears, and at once set to work with a will that drove all but the actual present from mind and memory.

I suppose I did my duty satisfactorily, for ere the week was out, my mistress said: "So, Gretchen; you get on capitally."

She had evidently forgotten or, perhaps, kindly overlooked the destruction of a tray of glass tankards and the libation of wine one day unexpectedly poured forth at the feet of an expectant guest. But she was a good, kindly woman, and always did her best to render our life less fatiguing and our service as light as possible.

There was but little to learn. To remember orders without confusing them, execute them as quickly as we could, and turn a careless, if not a deaf, ear to the daily passage of nonsense addressed us by the young officers and students. You may think that this last was, perhaps, the most difficult. I did not find it so, and paid no more attention to their declarations, comical or sentimental, than I did to the cackling of the geese in the meadow beyond.

"You are a valiant maiden," said old Weisenborn to me one day that he had accidentally witnessed my triumphant defeat of an importunate coxcomb: "that is just the way to serve them? Always take the ridiculous side of the question and no harm will ever come either to you or me."

And in fact I found his advice as effective as it was easy.

We were three Hebes, who waited. Anna, a quiet, pretty creature with a slight tendency to romance; Sophia a reserved young woman, silent and suspicious, and with an eternal cold in the head; and myself. We all slept in a large room at the top of the house, and, I assure you, it was a blessed moment in which we locked the door, and, undressing as fast as possible, took possession of our comfortable beds. Ah, the sound, dreamless sleep of those young days!

I don't know what happened—I could never find out—but one fine morning Sophia packed up her things and left the Halle. Did she go to better herself—or to be married—or had she been quietly dismissed? We could not say—only we didn't cry over her departure. Even had we felt inclined to do so time would not have permitted the luxury, for spring was well on, and the garden was as populous by day as the hall was during the evening.

The Weisenborns were making a good business of it.

One morning early, as I was arranging the stools in the garden, my mistress put her head out of the kitchen window, and calling, bid me come to her at once.

I obeyed, and as much to my surprise as pleasure, found myself face to face with my father, whom I had not seen since last holiday, nearly a month ago.

"This is your cousin Gertrude," said he to me, after our first greeting and inquiries were over. "Her aunt is dead, and she is left alone in the world. Frau Weisenborn has been good enough to take her in the place of the maid who has left. I hope you will be kind to her."

I had sometimes heard of Gertrude Hammel, who had lived all her life with an old aunt in a little town at some distance from Bonn, but I had never seen her; and now, as she stood before me, I could not take my gaze off her. Dark, rather inclined to be stout, with magnificent black eyes and hair, she was utterly unlike anything I had ever yet seen. She a serving-maid! With that soft, apathetic beauty of hers, she seemed fitter for anything on earth than to do daily battle with beer glasses and besiegers!

Nor was I wrong. She turned out to be the softest, best tempered, laziest, and most apathetic creature I ever came across. I suppose this last quality saved her; for the siege laid against her by all the harum-scarum frequenters of the place was terrific.

I was going to add that she was, perhaps, also a little stupid; but refrain upon second thoughts and a glance at the "Almanack de Gotha" lying beside me on my writing table.

You had better judge for yourself. You can well suppose that she was of little help to Anna and myself, and yet we never could resist the soft pleading of those large dark eyes, or scold her for her unceasing and incorrigible laziness. Despite her inactivity, however, she turned out a small fortune for the business; for all Bonn took to flocking to our Halle to see the beautiful waiting maid, whose insensibility, they said, was only to be equalled by her loveliness.

There was a grand festival somewhere out of the town—I forget where—and all the world and his wife had gone thither, so that the Halle remained, for the moment, all but deserted. We three girls determined to make the most of it, and the weather being delicious, we established ourselves in the little arbour, where I had so stupidly sat down to cry on the morning of my installation at the Halle. The

lilacs were in full bloom, and the breath of wall-flowers floated on the breeze; the Rhine below lay glittering in the sunshine, and a soft azure haze slumbered upon the far-off hills. It was one of those days when, at seventeen, one feels that the gift of life alone is all-sufficient for unbounded enjoyment.

My greatest worldly possession then consisted in a muslin frock and a string of coral—and yet I was far richer than I am now, with all my acres and banker's book thrown into the bargain. There we sat, Anna and myself with our knitting, Gertrude idle as usual, blinking in silent, lazy enjoyment of the warmth and light around.

"How I wish there were fairies now-a-days," sighed Anna as, laying down her stocking and picking up a handful of gravel, she began to fling the pebbles one by one into the green waters below. "There were lots of them in ages gone by, you know: all sorts of good people, who, from time to time, appeared to favoured men and maidens, and promised them whatever they chose to ask."

"But did they keep their promises?" I inquired; for my faith in the marvellous was not nearly so orthodox as was Anna's; and I had, even then, a tendency towards that matter of fact inquiry which has, more than once, been set down by my present associates as one of the remaining vestiges of my humble birth.

"Of course they did," replied Anna, with an air of conviction as entire as if she had been defending the cause of her catechism.

And looking back at the past, and then around upon the present, I am sometimes tempted to believe that some elf or other must that day have been lurking among the leaves overhead, or peering out upon us from the blossoms of the pink hawthorn.

"What would you wish for, Anna, if you had the luck to meet with one?"

"Wish for!" returned Anna. "Why, a good husband, to be sure. That's already a dozen wishes in one, you know."

At the word husband, Gertrude had roused herself, and seemed to take a sort of feeble interest in our talk.

"And what is he to be like?" I asked.

"Oh, a fine, handsome fellow, of course—a farmer with a snug place of his own and no stepmother."

"Mother-in-law, I suppose you mean."

"Well, it's all one; they do nothing but nag at poor girls who enter the house. You see, I am not very ambitious, after all, Gretchen."

"Not half so ambitious as I am," cried I, entering into the joke. "I wish for nothing less than a count, and a rich one too. When one is about it, one may as well do the thing grandly."

"Well done, Gretchen. And when you are a countess you will come in a fine carriage with a lot of servants, and eat strawberries and cream at my farm. And you shall tell me of all the balls you go to, and the jewels you wear, and I will relate you the history of the brown cow and the last brood of turkeys. Oh, it will be charming!"

"And you, Gertrude?" I asked.

"Oh, I must have a Prince, and wear velvet dresses, and eat as much cake as I please every day of my life."

"And get up at ten o'clock!" cried Anna.

"Or never get up at all," I said. "You could lie in bed with a crown on your head and a tray of sweets at your side, you know; it would ——"

"Now, Gretchen! you are for ever making fun of me. If I am fond of sleep it is no reason why I should never get up at all."

"Yes, I forgot the velvet dress. You couldn't very well wear it in bed."

"You are very unkind," laughed Gertrude, as she moved a little aside to catch the warmth of the broad sunlight more fully.

"There are people coming in," cried Anna, jumping up. "We had better be off."

And leaving Gertrude to the unmolested enjoyment of sunshine, sleep and self, we hurried away for orders.

II.

St. Sylvester night. We had had a supper of all kinds of good things, and Gertrude had given ocular proof of a formidable power of silent energy in the consumption of cake and preserves; after which, with a parting glass of wine to the health of our kind master and mistress, we ascended to our room, chatting gaily about the approaching holidays, and speculating eagerly upon the probable quantity and quality of our New Year's gifts.

It struck midnight as I carefully locked the door behind us, while Anna went straight to her drawers, opened one and said: "Here is the lead, and there upon the shelf you will find the ladle. Now let us prepare all things properly. Good gracious, what a dreadful night!"

And so it was. The wind was howling as if a thousand demons had been let loose, and every moment or two our window rattled as if they were attempting a forcible entry; the rain, too, fell in torrents, and occasionally there was a heavy thud in the distance as the accumulated snow slid from some roof down into the street below.

"An awful night, indeed!" I repeated, after we had all stood listening for a minute or two.

"Awful indeed!" echoed Anna in a low voice. "And you know that all sorts of powers, good and evil are abroad to-night; and if one had but the courage to ——"

"Now, Anna, pray don't begin with any of your dreadful tales," interrupted Gertrude, "they always hinder me from sleeping."

"What a blessing it would be if they could get you up a little earlier in the morning," I cried. "The mistress wasn't over-pleased at catching you coming down nearly an hour late yesterday."

"Well, never mind that now, girls; we have other things to do, so

let us set to work. You, Gertrude, are the youngest, so it's your turn first to try your luck. There, take the spoon and hold it over the candle till the lead is melted. And you, Gretchen, put a little more water into the basin."

We were all standing round a small table close under the curtainless window—and as the ladle, held by Gertrude over the flame of our solitary candle, intercepted the light, strange gleams flickered around, and mysterious shadows floated up from the darkened corners of the wide, low-roofed room.

In spite of myself my heart beat somewhat quicker than usual. The air around seemed to grow thick and heavy; I felt as if invisible beings were silently gathering about us.

"There, that will do," whispered Anna, in husky tones; "it is quite melted. Now pour it into the water, and as you do so, mind you pray with all your strength for a sure token from your future husband."

With a somewhat unsteady hand she withdrew the ladle from the light, which instantly flared up and cast its yellow glow full around. She was about carefully to pour the gleaming fluid into the basin, when there came such a thud at the window above as to make us all start and cry out. Down flashed the lead all in a lump, hissing and spluttering as it reached the water, to settle at the bottom with a smothered bubble and spurt.

"What could it have been?" whispered Gertrude, with ashy face and terror-stricken gaze; "did you ever hear such a fearful sound?"

"Why, you goose," said I, "it was an owl, or some night bird, of course—attracted to the window by the sudden flare up of the candle. What else do you suppose it would be?"

"Who knows?" murmured Anna, mysteriously: "we are not all three alone here this night. But hush, it is better not to talk about it. Now see what you have got."

Gertrude took out the mystic cast—a small compact lump—which, with a little imagination aiding, bore a strange resemblance to a closed coronet.

Anna gave me an expressive look, while Gertrude seemed not to know whether to laugh or cry.

I broke forth with "The Prince! The Prince! It was he and not an owl that knocked at the window. My best respects to Her Highness Princess Gertrude of ——"

"Oh, hush, Gretel, hush!" implored Anna, "you don't know what ears ——"

She broke off suddenly and seized me by the arm, for the storm burst forth into such a terrific roar that the very house seemed to tremble, and the window rattled again as if some hand from without were trying to open it in impotent fury.

We listened breathlessly. There came a sudden lull, and then Gertrude, whose eyes had been fixed upon the window above us, said

in a querulous tone: "It's mean of Frau Weisenborn not to give us curtains! If anybody were to get upon the roof they could look straight in."

"Who knows what eyes are upon us?" murmured Anna.

Gertrude gave a little scream, and even I looked anxiously round.

"Ah, not visible eyes," added Anna, following my glance.

"Bah!" cried I, making an effort to throw off the uncomfortable feeling creeping over me, "that's all stuff. And you, Gertrude, console yourself; when you are a princess you can have silk curtains to your heart's content. Now, Anna, it is your turn."

Down went the light as the ladle lowered over the flame, and once more the weird gleams and floating shadows began their wild dance around us. Not a word was spoken—even the elements without seemed to pause in their strife to look on.

Then awestricken, as if her fate had really depended upon the test, Anna poured the liquid metal slowly and carefully into the water.

"A corn sheaf!" I exclaimed, as I saw her take out the object upon which she seriously seemed to think her fate depended.

"A corn sheaf?" she asked. "Do you think it looks like a corn sheaf?"

It was just possible to trace a likeness, and as we are always ready to see what we hope and wish for, Anna's face put on a look of respectful thankfulness—in homage, I suppose, to the invincible powers which she declared were surging around us.

But, incredulous as I was, I could not hinder a cold shiver running all through me as, in my turn, I took my place at the table, ladle in hand.

It seemed as if the lead would never melt.

"Do make haste," answered Gertrude: "just see how low the candle is getting; and oh, I am *so* sleepy!"

There! at last it was all liquefied—all save one bit that remained obstinately standing out like an island in the midst of the miniature sea of many-tinted scum.

"No, not yet," said Anna, seeing me about to move, and at the same time touching my arm to prevent my doing so. But slight as her action had been, it was sufficient to cause the ladle to extinguish the flame and plunge us into utter darkness.

Lead and ladle fell from my hands, fortunately without touching any of us, and then once more the storm burst forth with renewed fury. The wind roared and raved, the window rattled, the rain dashed down as if to sweep away everything from the face of the earth.

Legions of voices seemed to rave at each other—some hoarse and menacing, surging upwards from the dark, deserted road below; others shrill and shrinking, now breaking into a mocking yell, now dying away in a harrowing wail, answering from the regions above and seeming to congregate round the old belfry of the great church hard by.

There we cowered in the darkness, shivering, not so much with cold, as with an undefined, expectant horror, scarcely daring to breathe, and listening mutely to the roar of the infuriated elements.

Suddenly, in the midst of the tumult, a deep-mouthed bell rang out its lugubrious note. Quicker and quicker the brazen clang rushed forth to speed upon the wings of the storm, a herald of destruction and dismay.

Dong! Dong! Dong! Clang! Clang! Clang! The vibrations seemed to float over-head, and each ill-omened note fell upon my brain with ever-nearing intensity.

I knew the terrible tale that brazen tongue was pealing forth. A tale of dread—human life at stake—death in its most terrible form—heroism doing battle with the raging, many-tongued foe—household gods consuming like chaff before the stony gaze of the stricken owner—hero and victim entombed beneath a chaos of burning brick and blackened rafter.

There was the rush of engines through the street below, and a faint, fitful glare gleamed ominously through the window. By its sickly light we crept softly and silently to bed.

The next morning I found my lead lying upon the brick floor in scattered drops—*nine* in number.

Were they pearls or tears?

Before the year was out, two of the great events connected with this history had taken place. Anna had married, and married a farmer; a yellow-haired, blue-eyed, stalwart young fellow with a snug homestead of his own, all unencumbered by mother-in-law, or obstacle of any other kind.

Anna's Sylvester harbinger had proved a true one; and, after dancing, Heaven knows how many miles, at her wedding, we left her with the glad assurance that her lot, at least, had fallen upon good ground.

So much for event number One.

Event number Two was my ox-eyed cousin's engagement to Captain Falk, whose regiment had been quartered, a few months previous at Bonn.

If not a very well assorted match in other respects, it was at least, perfectly suitable in one—equality of fortune. Or rather of the reverse—for the one was just as penniless as the other. He, too, was very handsome, and as they were both dreadfully in love with one another, and there was nobody possessed of legal right to interpose, they rushed all unhindered upon matrimonial suicide, taking each other for better or worse, in spite of debts and the discomfort that was sure to follow.

Gertrude Hammel became Frau Falk, and quitted the Halle to take possession of her husband's quarters; leaving behind her a crowd of envious admirers and a broken dream of royalty and velvet dresses. Her Sylvester token had proved false.

Falk's service kept him at Bonn, but there was no reason why they

should have frequented the Halle as much as they did. It was an utter want of tact, and one day I fairly told Gertrude my opinion on the subject.

"What pleasure can you possibly find in drinking beer at a table you once served, and being rudely stared at by every creature in the place?"

She took my remonstrance in good part, murmured something about its being so conveniently near the barracks, and continued coming as before.

"After all," I said to myself, "it's no business of mine; and on the whole, I think they are better suited to each other than I at first supposed."

One afternoon Gertrude was sitting in the garden as usual, playing with the coffee spoon and cup before her, awaiting the arrival of her husband, and talking idly with myself as I leaned against the table at her side. Two students entered, sat down close to where we were, and ordered some beer which I hurried off to fetch.

On my return I heard the elder say to his companion: "The stupid ass has quite spoiled the stone; just look, your highness."

"Well, a count's coronet with only eight pearls is something new, certainly. Why didn't you send it to Frankfort?"

"Impatience—my usual weakness. I wanted my ring at once, and am now punished for it."

He was a fine, handsome young fellow, that count. A bright, open face, and a smile that went straight to one's heart. I know it did to mine.

His companion, meanwhile, sat gazing, I thought, rather coolly across to where Gertrude was sitting, still alone, and in expectation of her husband.

The prince, too, was certainly handsome, but not pleasant to look at. There was cold scrutiny in those greeny-grey eyes of his, and a sharpness about the mouth that augured ill. His feet and hands also were much too small for one of his size, and I had always heard that this was an infallible sign of a tyrannical disposition.

Well, from that day his Royal Highness, who was studying at Bonn, and his companion, the count, were daily frequenters of the Halle.

I quickly grew familiar with the latter, so winning and respectful were his ways; while the former, even to the very last, and in spite of his efforts to conciliate me, never ceased to impress me disagreeably.

For I was Gertrude's cousin. Had I not been so, I was quite aware he would never even have looked at me.

Meanwhile the Falk household was not going on very smoothly. Debts increased and difficulties threatened; bickerings began and reproaches resounded; till at last, one fine morning, love caught sight of want staring in at the door, shuddered, spread his wings and flew out of the window, never more to return.

It takes but a short time to write all this, so I must tell you that things did not come to this pass until nearly four years had elapsed. Gertrude was already the mother of two boys.

At last, however, just as all concerned were on the look out for the final crash the whole town of Bonn was thrown into an extraordinary state of excitement by a piece of news that spread from mouth to mouth with the rapidity of lightning.

Captain Falk had paid all his debts to the last heller, and was on the eve of being exchanged into another regiment; and last, though certainly not least, he was to be divorced as soon as the legal formalities could be accomplished.

"You don't mean to say it is true?" I cried, seizing my cousin's two hands in my own, and giving her a shake in the hope of arousing something like a spirit within her.

"Yes, it is true, dear. Falk and I cannot get on at all together—and ——"

"And what?"

"And I am going to marry the prince." She uttered the words with about as much emotion as you or I would show in observing that it was a fine day.

But on hearing them I felt as if an abyss had suddenly opened at my feet.

"Marry the prince!" I shrieked; "have you gone utterly mad?"

"Not a bit, dear. He has paid all Falk's debts, and given him a lot of money besides, and so ——"

"He has bought you," I screamed; and without a word more I flung out of the room and rushed back to my tankards.

It was but too true. Before the day was out, all Bonn was ringing with the news—ere a week was over the papers were full of it.

The Elector's fury was described as terrible, the sarcasms put into the mouth of all his royal relations were cutting. But there it ended; and to this day I cannot tell why competent authority did not step in and hinder one of the wildest matches that romance ever dreamed of.

I suppose secret policy did the work, and that some power or other found it convenient to abet a marriage which, on the event of his Royal Highness succeeding to the throne, would render his children incapable of inheriting.

Be that as it may, facts followed each other with marvellous celerity. Gertrude was created a Countess, and shortly afterwards the Emperor of Austria raised her to the rank of Princess. His Royal Highness the Prince of —— espoused the Princess of —— and thus the eyes and ears of the world were satisfied, though not a soul was ignorant of the part taken by the beautiful serving-maid in turning the line of succession from one of the oldest houses of Europe.

Within a year I, too, quitted the Weisenborns, and was shortly

after married to the count, with whom I passed fourteen years of happiness such as, I fear, seldom falls to the lot of any woman.

He was taken from me, and I have ever since remained a lone, childless woman—for my parents were long dead—with no other solace in life save doing what I can to lighten the burdens laid upon the shoulders of those around me.

Some ten years after Gertrude's second marriage I had a letter from her begging me to come and spend a fortnight at one of the Royal summer residences.

"Go," said my husband, on seeing me hesitate; "go, for I know the prince well enough to feel assured that your cousin stands in need of a friendly face and a heart to confide in. She is alone at the castle, so you will not be obliged to meet your old antipathy."

"Of course. Do you think if he had been there Gertrude would have dared to invite me?"

"I don't think she would; and I am quite sure I should not have allowed you to go. But as it is ——"

And so I went.

Our meeting was, for me, at least, full of strange emotion. It brought all the past once more so vividly to my mind! she was looking well, handsomer than ever, and to all appearance, perfectly suited to the royal luxury with which she was surrounded. What a difference between the splendour of her present dwelling and the great curtainless room of the Halle!

As we wandered through the beautiful gardens which art and nature had combined to render almost a paradise, and talked over our early days, recalling, one by one, the little anecdotes which marked the humble course of our laborious life, it seemed to me as if I were dreaming, and that the present would all of a sudden vanish away, and I find myself once more the poor waiting-maid of old Weisenborn's establishment.

But the days rolled on, and no change made itself felt in our calm, pleasant life. Gertrude, as well as myself, had had all kinds of masters, by whose teaching we had profited to a great extent; our field of conversation was therefore not exactly limited to the records of the past.

Of her children—and she had six, to say nothing of the two little Falks, for whom the prince had undertaken to provide—I saw but little. They were surrounded by a whole household of their own, and a staff of governors and ladies; a living hedge, in fact, bristling with court etiquette, and which the mother herself seldom penetrated without receiving some covert scratch or other.

Of course before all these starched worthies, Gertrude and myself were invariably "your Highness" and "your Ladyship"; but in the happier privacy of my own rooms, or the green alleys of the park, we were thee and thou to each other as in the simple days of old.

And although Gertrude never spoke of her husband, I could not

be blind to the fact of her being a most unhappy wife. His violence was terrible at times, and nowhere made itself more felt and feared than beneath the royal roof. His subjects—he was the reigning elector now, his father being dead—could manage to keep out of his way, while his servants were obliged to bear with all the outbreaks of his ungovernable temper.

In a word, I was painfully convinced that my cousin had paid very dearly for her velvet gowns and unlimited cake.

"Gretchen," said she to me one afternoon as we were walking in the park, "I should so like to see Anna once more. Do you think we could manage to go and pay her a visit?"

"My dear, how could you contrive to get away? We couldn't do it in one day, you know."

"No, but I would go to the Residency for a few days, and from there we might easily escape. It's a very good time, for that odious lady-in-waiting is laid up with her quinsy, and the Elector won't return for at least a fortnight. Do let us try."

The beautiful, sleepy eyes looked at me as pleadingly as they had ever done at the Halle when coaxing me to wash up the army of glasses fallen to her share.

"Very well," I said, "let us try it."

There was little difficulty, as it proved, and, getting up at daylight one fine morning, we left the capital for Anna's part of the world by rail; and at ten were safely deposited at the little village station, where we found Anna herself awaiting us. For I had written to announce our coming.

"Oh, you dear, good creatures," she cried upon catching sight of us. "This is what I call real friendship!"

I will describe to you neither Anna's husband nor her home; I will only say that they were both such as her best friends would wish her, and that the children—two, a boy and a girl—were well worthy of their parents.

"I can't give you the strawberries I once promised you," said Anna, laughing, "for the season's over, you know; but I have done what I could. And, besides, you have not come in the fine carriage, with no end of servants. So we are quits as to that. Now, off with your things—you must both be starving."

Breakfast had been laid in the open air, under the shade of a large horse-chestnut, and we sat down to all the good things provided, as quietly happy a party as, perhaps, often met.

We had a hundred questions to ask and answer, a thousand things to recall or remark; and in the midst of that pleasant, homely little circle we paid slight heed to the flight of time.

We were sitting enjoying our coffee when the click of the garden gate was heard, and, the next moment, the sound of heavy steps upon the gravel. Anna rose to see who it was; for between us and the broad walk leading to the house stood a belt of shrubs, effectually

screening our rural gathering from the sight of the new comer. A smothered exclamation caused us all to start from our seats—only, however, to remain rooted to the spot. For there, in shabby, disordered dress, the hard lines of debauch upon his still handsome face, stood Falk, the once brilliant captain, the divorced husband of the Princess of ——.

Instinctively I stepped before my cousin so as to screen her from the view of the unwelcome intruder. But too late—recognition had been mutual. How I blamed myself for ever having consented to the visit that was productive of such an unheard of adventure, and the consequences of which I could, by no means, foresee or calculate!

But Falk's first words relieved me as to my self-reproach, and, on the contrary, caused me to rejoice. "Ah, Gertrude, I've been on the watch this many a day, and, but for this freak of yours, should have been obliged, after all, to present myself at the palace—though my appearance ——" He broke off with a bitter laugh as he looked down at the shabby clothes he wore.

Gertrude had sunk upon the chair, pale and trembling, and sat there gazing in speechless disquietude at her former husband.

"What do you want here, sir?" asked Anna's husband, taking a step forward so as to place himself directly before my cousin.

"I am very sorry to have been obliged to trespass upon your premises," replied Falk with ironical politeness, "and still more sorry to be compelled to add that my business lies, not with you, but with the Princess of ——."

"Oh, Gretchen, for heaven's sake do not let them quarrel! Ask him what he wants ——"

And I did so.

The negotiation ended in Falk's gaining his object and leaving with a considerable sum of money in his pocket—money kindly advanced by Anna's husband to be repaid by my poor cousin upon our return to her capital. Her capital! What irony!

The shock of this meeting left her with a slight nervous trembling of the head which she never got rid of. And when, years afterwards, I again met her at Ischl, she whispered to me in a moment of unguarded confidence: "Oh, Gretel, I have learned to my cost that mine, at least, was not the wisest of the three wishes."

Here the MS. ended; and I had scarcely time to pick up the loose pages fallen upon the carpet beside me, when the door opened, and a servant entered to inform me that the three o'clock coffee was waiting.

"Very well. Be good enough to tell the Countess that I will be with her immediately."

And as I am sure, dear reader, that you are much too polite to be the cause of keeping a lady waiting, you will not take it ill if I wish you a somewhat abrupt farewell.

BERESFORD CHRISTMAS.

GOOD-NIGHT, MY LOVE!

The gloaming grey is creeping
  Around our trysting-place,
And in soft shadow steeping
  Thy lovely drooping face.
Good-night, my love! good-night, good-night!
  Still, still we linger heart to heart,
And though we say good-night, good-night!
  Ah, me! we cannot part!

The crystal dew is blinking
  Upon the drowsy rose,
Whose languid head is sinking
  In indolent repose.
Good-night, my own! good-night, good-night!
  See, now I twine her in thy hair!
Ah, happy flower! good-night, good-night!
  No thorn shall wound thee there.

The night winds sing thy praises
  Through every rustling tree—
Through all the whispering daisies
  They waft my sighs to thee.
Good-night, sweetheart! good-night, good-night!
  Trip o'er their heads with fairy feet—
One smile, one kiss, good-night, good-night!
  My daisy, pure and sweet!

All stately, pale and tender
  The moon sails through the gloom,
Go, love, and may her splendour
  Thy homeward path illume.
Good-night, dear love! good-night, good-night!
  There, now, thy trembling hands are free—
My star, my Queen, good-night, good-night!
  Be sure I'll dream of thee.

FANNY FORRESTER.

M. ELLEN STAPLES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

THE CASE WAS EMPTY.

THE ARGOSY.

JUNE, 1885.

THE MYSTERY OF ALLAN GRALE.

CHAPTER XX.

MRS. GRALE'S DIAMOND CROSS.

MARY ANNE GRALE sat back in her carriage as it bowled swiftly up and stopped at Moorland House. Her thoughts had been running upon George Vivian, who had parted with her at the turning, and upon the "yellow woman," whose movements appeared to be full of mystery.

Running lightly upstairs, when she went in, she was met by her mother in the far corridor.

"Well, my dear, did you send the telegram?"

"Yes, mamma. And I should think the answer is on its way back by this time."

Mrs. Grale had not to wait long for it. The reply came in the words: "Box for Mr. Allan Grale still at Corrabuin. Telegram shall be delivered to him with it."

Mrs. Grale scarcely understood whether or not this was what she had hoped for. True, it gave her a chance of communicating with her son, which would have been lost had the box been already removed. But she had not received that assurance of his safety and well-being which she would have had, had he claimed his property; and she was left in doubt whether the more commonplace suggestion might not be the right one, to wit, that his box had nothing to do with his present absence, but had been sent North by somebody who did not know he had returned South.

Still, it was stimulating to feel that at any moment a message might arrive from him; and Mrs. Grale's spirits rose with the renewed hope.

On the following day, she went downstairs to look after the ways of her household in her usual fashion. Mary Anne was glad to see her mother going about again; but she only realised her full cause for

gratitude over this change for the better when a footman rode up to the door to deliver a letter from Lady Laura Bond, and said he was to wait for an answer. Now, Lady Laura kept no footman of her own, but her messenger was in a resplendent livery and mounted on a blood horse. This in itself was interesting and exciting. Lady Laura's envelope was resplendent in all the newest glories of monogram and crest; and it bore an invitation, to use Lady Laura's own expression, to "an informal dinner" to be given by her that very evening, if only her dear friends at Moorland House could forgive the abruptness of the notice for which the explanation would be the best apology. Lady Laura's cousin, Viscount Rockford, and his great friend, Lord Pelerin, son of the Earl of Eaglescraig, were paying her a flying visit in the course of an equestrian tour they were making. They had only arrived yesterday and would be off to-morrow; "and I want to give them as much pleasure as I can," wrote Lady Laura, adding, with subtle flattery, "you must forgive the freedom I take, for since I discovered that Mrs. Grale was the old friend of my dearest Bell Matthewson, I feel as if she were my old friend too."

"Oh, Mary Anne," cried Mrs. Grale, "I cannot go; these people are too grand for me. I might find heart for it another time, but to-night I should be thinking of nothing but Alny. You and your father can go without me."

"I don't know that," said Mary Anne sullenly. "Papa may not be inclined to go; I don't suppose he will; and I cannot go alone. It is the way it always is. Alny may be let spoil everything: I am never considered!"

Her mother felt there was some justice in Mary Anne's feeling, though it might be selfishly stated.

"If I knew where he is I should not mind," she said, with a sigh.

"You will hear to-morrow, no doubt," returned Mary Anne, bitterly. "Only that will be too late for Lady Laura's party."

Mrs. Grale saw the force of this. She had, too, that strange superstitious feeling, which many of us know—something which is implied in the old proverb "a watched pot never boils." And she knew she was watching for the longed-for news—as if confident assurance might not speedily bring what anxious fear might avert.

"Well, Mary Anne, then I suppose I must go," she conceded. "What one's born to, that one must go through," she added wearily, quoting a fatalistic saying familiar to her girlhood.

So Miss Grale wrote the answer to Lady Laura. "Her mother and she would be delighted to accept the kind invitation. So, she was sure, would papa, but he was not at home and might have some previous engagement which he could not break." And Mary Anne added a few words—"that these impromptu entertainments were the most charming of any."

And indeed when Mrs. Grale herself had once braced her nerves

to make the effort, she began to look forward to the evening with some pleasure. She felt a triumphant consciousness that it was all through a friend of her own—a friend of that far off past which her husband had taught her to despise—that she was now put on so familiar a footing with the aristocracy. She began to ponder over her rich velvet dress, in which she always felt hot and uncomfortable, and her Brussels lace, which was always catching hold of the bracelets and fal-de-rals of jewellery which she must wear. Mrs. Grale had all the instincts of a peasant race, which keeps its wealth stored in a stocking. She liked to own grand things, but she preferred looking at them to wearing them.

At her request, Mary Anne sent a note to the Works, notifying Mr. Grale of this invitation. As her mother had consented to go, it seemed to Mary Anne of comparatively little moment whether her father went or not; she supposed he had been invited as a mere form of civility. In reality, Lady Laura's invitation was not so impromptu as it looked. That cousin of hers, Viscount Rockford, was an impecunious young peer, and was just now deeply in debt. Lady Laura had always had a liking for the lad—the deadly liking of a woman without heart or principle; yet there might have been some gratitude mingled with it. For this young Viscount had sometimes helped her when she had greatly needed help. When he came of age, he succeeded to a rather fair property, his father having died; but he had now contrived to dissipate the most of it. Lady Laura had written to tell him that if he took his equestrian tour in her direction, she might be able to make him acquainted with a wealthy plebeian, who in his complacency at being introduced to "a scion of the aristocracy" might "be useful to him." Lady Laura said no more: Viscount Rockford needed no more: the equestrian tour did not fail to bend in the right direction, and if there should be any spoils, young Lord Pelerin was there to take his share.

Of course she had alluded to Mr. Grale; and Mrs. Grale and Mary Anne might have been more astonished than gratified to find what an important item in the entertainment the husband and father really was!

Mr. Grale sent home word that he should certainly go to Lady Laura's. He had not forgotten the ill temper he had shown over the last visit to that titled lady, and during these days he was doing whatever he could think of to please and gratify his wife. Possibly it was because she was so helplessly miserable over Allan's departure. Possibly, he had some deeper reason.

She was in her chamber, when he came in to pass through it to his dressing-room. The velvet robe was already laid out, sundry adjuncts to it filling the room with slight, sweet perfume. Mrs. Grale stood over her jewel case: she shut it hastily when she heard her husband's step.

"Well, Polly!—looking at your ornaments!" he said, pleasantly.

"You must choose your best for to-night. What's the good of giving you pretty things if you make that case their coffin!"

"I was just thinking what I should wear," she answered.

"Wear your diamond cross, for one thing. I never see that upon you now."

The diamond cross was the costliest gift he had ever given her. He stood over her, putting his hand on her shoulder. The hand could not help being a heavy one, but the gesture was intended to be kindly.

"That diamond cross is so grand," said Mrs. Grale. "It seems too good for me, and that's why I don't wear it. I always fear people may fancy it must be imitation. They would not think you would waste so much money on your old wife."

Mr. Grale laughed. "I'll give you another to-morrow, if you like," he said in a fit of generosity. "There's no waste in buying diamonds. They don't wear out, and they keep their value. Put on the cross, Polly; get it out and let me look at it. I must not admire it when it is on you, you know!"

It was a large, well-filled jewel case. The top tray was occupied by the bouncing cameos, and bulky golden and silvern gyves, and the chains which were Mrs. Grale's favourite and everyday wear. She very seldom penetrated beneath that tray. But she had been to the bottom of her jewel box to-day already, though she had opened none of the jewel cases, into most of which she had not looked for months.

She lifted out the top tray, and then that beneath it. The diamond cross was never kept in either of these. There was a third tray, and a fourth was made by the bottom of the jewel case itself. The diamond cross was stored in a flat morocco case, which lay in the third tray.

Mrs. Grale took out the case and pressed the spring. It was a little stiff.

"That shows you don't open it often enough," remarked her husband, as the lid flew up.

The case was empty.

Mrs. Grale uttered an exclamation. He was silent. The two stepped apart staring blankly at each other. Mr. Grale spoke first.

"Valuable articles like that should be always kept in their proper places," he said, in reproof.

"This is its place; it has always been kept here," she answered. "If it is not here, it is not anywhere. I have always put the cross away myself—and I put it here the last time I had it on."

"When was that?"

"Last Christmas Day. I've never got it out since, or looked at it. Where would it be safer than in this box? It must have been taken. I'm sure ——"

There was a look on her husband's face which somehow checked Mrs. Grale's voluble self-defence.

"I suppose you leave your keys about sometimes," he remarked, grimly; "all women do."

"I've done it as little as it's possible to do it," she retorted, rather angrily. "One can't live for ever as if one was surrounded by thieves! No care will guard one, if one is. Why, in your own office, Richard, where you manage everything after your own fashion, things go wrong sometimes, or what was that talk about young Carr?"

It was a very sad thing to mislay a diamond cross, but for a woman like Mrs. Grale, it was even sadder to be accused of want of carefulness. That was her form of reputation!

Mr. Grale seemed not to heed this sally. He was opening one after another of the other cases in the jewel box. His wife pounced upon him.

"Don't meddle with my things, please," she cried. "You'll only put everything in confusion. I know I put the cross in its proper place; but I'll look over all the boxes to please you. Only I'll do it myself."

"It is more likely to be found in this jewel case than anywhere, if it is to be found at all," said Mr. Grale, persisting in his search.

Ah, she foresaw what he would do! He had lifted out the third tray. She knew what he saw. She set down the tray she held, lest she should let it fall.

What Mr. Grale saw was only a common brown envelope, such as are used for telegrams. He looked steadily into the depths of the box for a moment, and then put in his finger and picked it out, saying, in a steel-cold voice, though, perhaps, he meant it to be a joking one,

"This is a strange thing for an orderly woman like you to keep in such a place, Mary. It looks like a secret."

Her useless little spurt of rebellion was over. She knew he would open and read it. She could only stand breathless while he did so.

It was but the telegram she had received yesterday from the station-master at Corrabuin. She had carried it in her pocket until she was about to prepare for the dinner party, and she had just stowed it in what she had deemed this secure hiding-place when her husband had interrupted her.

Mr. Grale read it and re-read it. Then he turned it about and scrutinised the date and all the other time-marks upon it.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked his wife.

"Oh, Dick!" she cried, "don't be so stern—don't frighten me! I'm quite sure you have not told me all that you know about Alny, and his going away! Why should not I, too, keep something to myself?"

"That is a different matter!" he said, in the same cold voice. "What is the meaning of *this?*"

Trembling and incoherently, interrupted by many tears and protestations, she told him the whole story, beginning with her sister's letter from Savoch. He listened in silence, nor did he even speak at once when it was done.

"Polly, you have begun to keep secrets from me, it seems," he said presently. "Are you sure you do not know anything of this missing diamond cross?"

"I?" she exclaimed in genuine amazement. "What do you take me for, Richard? What should I know of it—except that I put it away safely when I last wore it, and now it is gone! It must be gone; if it is not here, it is not anywhere."

"Women—well-meaning women, too—have disposed of jewels for the benefit of their scapegrace sons before now," he remarked, but not sternly. "Can you assure me you have not done this, Polly? Tell me the simple truth."

Mrs. Grale felt that this was an appeal, not an accusation, and she answered accordingly.

"Dick—I may have hidden things from you; things I thought of no consequence, like that telegram; but I have never told you one false word. It was not the telegram I cared to hide; but I could not speak of it without telling you of Marget's letter, and you know you never seem to care for me to hear from her."

"But that's your fancy," said Mr. Grale. "You may have a letter from her every day if you wish. Why not? What went wrong was not *her* fault—or Gibson's either."

"But what did you say just now, Richard—about disposing of jewels for the benefit of scapegrace sons? What did you mean? Poor Alny may be extravagant, but it has not come to that kind of thing with him, I hope! I suppose you were joking."

"Well, well; about the diamond cross—where is it?"

"I know no more where the cross is than you do, Richard. I can hardly suspect the servants. Though I don't think much of any of them, seeing how sharply I have to look after stores; they are all frightfully wasteful. I never do leave my keys about; but sometimes in changing a dress such an accident may happen."

"We won't suspect anybody at present," said Mr. Grale. "A mistake in that direction defeats itself. Say nothing about it yet, Mary, but keep your eyes and ears open: as I shall keep mine."

He spoke almost caressingly. Mrs. Grale felt quite grateful: it was not every man who would so generously have borne the loss of a trinket worth some hundreds of pounds—true, she thought proudly, it was not every man who could afford to bear it so easily.

"You'll take care of that," she said anxiously, as Mr. Grale put the Corrabuin telegram into his pocket.

"I'll take care of it," he replied. "And now, Polly, as the diamond cross is gone, put on something else, and make haste off to your party, not to keep the young lords waiting. I don't think I'll go, after all. A matter of business has occurred to me which I ought to see after: and if you ladies present yourselves, nobody will miss me," he added gallantly.

"I had no heart to go at first, Dick," said his wife, "and now I have less than ever. The world seems full of wickedness, and I dare say lords are no better than other people—perhaps not so good. Won't you take Mary Anne, and let me stay at home?"

"You cannot do my business, and that is what I'm staying at home for," he answered.

"Why should I be forced to go against my will?" asked his wife pettishly.

"We must give Mary Anne the chance of a little pleasure. You must go, not to disappoint her."

"Surely she could go by herself," said Mrs. Grale. "Just as I used to go out to tea in my young days. Who is going to eat her?"

"You didn't go to meet young lords," answered her husband. As he spoke, his eye fell on Bell Matthewson's portrait, which Mrs. Grale had put up on a bracket in the bed chamber.

"Well, I suppose I must go," she said, reluctantly. "But I shall not get that cross out of my head all the time. It's not the value of it I think of solely. Losing anything upsets me, even if it's only a hamper or a packet of envelopes. It seems like a reproach to oneself—and I, always fretting myself to death to take care of things!"

"Keep the reproach to yourself, then," said Mr. Grale. "Nobody knows of it but me, and I'll never bring it up against you."

"I'm not to tell even Mary Anne?" questioned Mrs. Grale. "Perhaps it is as well not, though, for I'm always scolding her for mislaying things, and she might think I'd better keep my sermons for myself in future. And yet I do hate keeping secrets, Richard," she added, wistfully.

"Not even Mary Anne. You two were going to keep the secret of that telegram," he remarked. "Now we two will keep this secret instead!"

"Very well; it must be as you say," assented Mrs. Grale, with a consoling reflection that it was sure to come out in time—everything always did, and not such a very long time either—witness this very telegram, which had only been concealed for one day!

"Then I'll go back to the office at once," said Mr. Grale. "And if I can get through all I wish in time, maybe I'll drive over and fetch you. Make my best apologies to Lady Laura."

"Your business is not to do anything about the diamond cross?—anything rash?" asked Mrs. Grale anxiously.

Her husband looked at her. He actually laughed. "No," he said, "my business is nothing about the diamond cross; I can assure you of that."

"Well, I never did see Richard take anything so easily before," mused his wife, as she went through her toilet. "I've known him more cross over an unexpected sovereign in the week's account, or with Mary Anne for forgetting some little commission, to say nothing of how he used to go on with poor Alny if he neglected to post a letter, or made a mistake in his ledgers. Why, to-day he was not cross at all! It might have kept us all much nearer together if we'd known that when anything serious happened, he'd be only like this."

Mrs. Grale might have changed her mind as to the way in which her husband took the affair, had she seen the expression of gloom and of utter misery which darkened over his face the moment he was out of her sight.

It takes very wise people to realise what all profess to believe, that the deepest feelings are those most effectually concealed from view.

Even the disappointment of Lady Laura Bond and her young guests at the rich man's absence was sufficiently keen to make them very chary of over-expressing it! And when the evening drew to a close, and Mr. Grale did not appear to escort his wife and daughter home, and Mary Anne noticed that Viscount Rockford and Lord Pelerin began to grow more vague in their plans for their tour, and to hint that if Lady Laura did not tire of their society, she might have it a little longer, the young lady's vain imagination would have hit upon anything to account for this change, rather than the absence of her blunt old father.

She began to feel quite a touching constancy to George Vivian, inasmuch as the young Viscount's soft voice and silken moustache did not at once banish her old neighbour's image from her mind.

CHAPTER XXI.

LOCKED IN.

It was not through pressure of business that Mr. Grale failed to keep his half-promise of fetching his wife from Lady Laura Bond's. Perhaps he had been sincere when he made it; but there lay a weight at his heart, a haunting terror looming before his mind, which grew upon him in the solitude of his counting-house, and so bowed him and crippled him, spiritually, that he felt unable to drag himself into the stare of strange eyes.

We hear a great deal of the woes of childhood, of the sorrows of youth, of the loneliness and loss of old age. But few have a thought of pity for the middle-aged, who, confronting the hard facts of life, have the helplessness of children without their unconsciousness, who have some of the longings of youth without its hopes, some of the losses of old age without its rest and honour. Middle age has but one compensation for its hardships. It stands in the hardest post in the battlefield of life, but it is the post of honour, which commands the way the fight must go. But what compensation is that, if the struggle is to end in defeat?

All the business which Mr. Grale transacted at the counting-house that evening was the writing of one short note.

He got out the reply telegram he had taken from his wife. It had been sent to Moorland House, so she must have so dated her initiatory one. Though he was writing at the Mills, he, after reflection, dated

that letter of his also from Moorland House. It was to the station-master at Corrabuin.

"Sir,—I understand from Mrs. Grale that a parcel or box, addressed to Mr. Grale, is now waiting at your station. May I request that you will forward it to the care of Messrs. Grale, The Mills, Dering. In case it was not prepaid to Corrabuin, I enclose a trifle, which will probably meet all expenses so far. There is now no need to send back the telegram from Mrs. Grale, which was sent to be delivered with it, nor need you send any further message to her here on the subject. Yours truly ——"

And just as he was going to append the signature of Richard Grale, he paused.

Once more he studied the telegram from Corrabuin, and once more he reflected.

The result was that he took another sheet of paper, and re-wrote his missive. This time it assumed note form. He had carefully worded his letter that the station-master might infer the "Mr. Grale" for whom the box was originally intended had now returned to his home and his wife, and was simply sending for his own. But the signature had found out the weak point—"Richard Grale" could not be made into "Allan Grale."

Next time, it stood thus: "Mr. Grale understands from Mrs. Grale that a parcel or box, addressed to Mr. Grale, is now waiting at Corrabuin Station. Mr. Grale requests that the station-master will forward it at once to the care of Messrs. Grale, the Mills, Dering. In case it was not prepaid to Corrabuin, a trifle is enclosed for expenses. There is now no need to send back the telegram from Mrs. Grale, which was sent to Corrabuin to be delivered with the box."

He did not add that final clause about there being no need to send any further message to her on the subject. It struck him that that had the appearance of over-cautiousness; which always suggests more than meets the eye, and which might in this instance defeat itself. As the matter stood, there seemed to him nothing that could rouse the Scotch station-master's suspicions. It seemed only as if a wife had telegraphed to her travelling husband, where she had reason to believe a telegram would reach him, and that on his unexpected return home, the telegram was unnecessary. And Mr. Grale was not unwilling that his wife's telegram should remain a little longer at Corrabuin. Possibly the station-master, either from caution or mere indifference, might not destroy it at once, and it might serve some purpose yet.

The rest of the evening Mr. Grale spent in a strange, unaccustomed idleness. He opened his ledgers and his correspondence books, but he did not find in them his usual interest and delight. He left the Mills and sauntered back to Moorland House. How cosy the dining-room looked, with the big fire, well made up, and the lamps turned

low, bringing out the rich colours of carpet and curtain! If, when Mr. Grale was a hard-working young man, earning thirty shillings a week, he could have foreseen such a home as this, he would have deemed his utmost destiny achieved. It did not seem so satisfactory now. It all seemed, scarcely haunted, perhaps, but so terribly empty. He sat down in the great arm-chair drawn up beside the hearth, and presently the warmth and the luxurious softness had their effect in, at least, soothing and lulling him. He fell asleep, not a sound or a pleasant sleep, but one in which his troubled thoughts mixed tormentingly with the phantasmagoria of dreamland. He dozed so for a long time, starting up at last, roused by a sound which he incorporated into a dream of a crowded assembly as the harsh voice of an usher cried, "Silence in the Court!"

The ladies had returned: the sound Mr. Grale had heard was Mary Anne, who had entered the room first, announcing to her mother, still in the hall, that "Papa was at home."

Mrs. Grale was rather puzzled by her husband's manner. She attributed his pre-occupation to his annoyance and bewilderment as to the loss of the diamond cross, but yet it was strange that instead of being cross and irritable with her, he seemed specially gentle and patient. As for Mary Anne, who knew of no special occurrence, she only wondered that papa did not ask more questions and show more curiosity in regard to those high-bred specimens of the human race, Viscount Rockford and Lord Pelerin.

Mrs. Grale had thought more and more of the diamond cross as the hours went by and she found she was not called to stand on self-defence, and as her terrors over the discovery of the Corrabuin telegram subsided. But even when they were alone together her husband did not speak of it, and she thought it best not to open the subject. She did not in the least suppose he had forgotten it. From her previous knowledge of Mr. Grale's methods, her conclusion was:

"The less he says, the more he is doing. I expect somebody will find himself or herself nicely pounced upon before long."

Nothing particular happened next day, except that George Vivian called at Moorland House and made himself very agreeable to the ladies. Things at the Court were going on the same: his uncle, the general, continued to improve, and Maria was still very unwell. George said that Edgar was also looking pale and depressed—he and his sister ought both to go away and spend the winter in the Riviera, or at least at Dinan, but neither of them seemed inclined to hear reason.

"If the general was only fit to be moved, Mr. Vivian," said outspoken Mrs. Grale, "I should say you all ought to go together, for I don't think you've looked yourself since your trip with Alny to the Highlands. I think the North could not have agreed with you."

"On the contrary," said George, "I think it agreed with me so

well that I mean to go back there as soon as I possibly can. I have been speaking about it two or three times already."

"Surely you young men left your hearts in the Highlands!" Mrs. Grale retorted. She began with a laugh and ended with a sigh. The sigh was for her son's absence and silence.

"No fear of it," smiled George. "At least I know my heart was in the South all the time, and I think I can answer for Alny's."

Mary Anne bent her head a little over her work, and tried to feel as if she was blushing.

Then it was discovered that George Vivian had already a slight acquaintance with Lord Pelerin. They had been thrown together in boyhood, and had met again, more recently, on the Continent. George showed a good deal of interest concerning their introduction to the gentleman and the impression he had created on their minds, thinking to himself that from what he knew of Pelerin's character and position, it was not at all unlikely that he was attracted by the prospect of the fortune the wealthy owner of the Mills might bestow upon his daughter. "If he was nothing worse than a fortune-hunter," thought George, "possibly the Grales might think he brought them a quid pro quo in his title. But if they knew all about him ——!" And then he reflected that if all was known about some other people within his ken, many things might be very different.

"Do you know Lord Rockford?" asked Mary Anne.

"Not much. I've met him. A nice enough young fellow, I believe, but fast: is too much with Pelerin."

"He is a nephew of Lady Laura," said Mary Anne. "His mother, the late Lady Rockford, and Lady Laura were sisters."

"Oh, I know," said George. "By the way, Miss Grale," added he, just thinking of it, "I have heard what the name of that young woman is whom we were wondering over on our way from Carstow."

Mary Anne looked puzzled for a moment.

"The woman in the yellow cloak," he explained.

"Oh, to be sure!" said Mary Anne. "And pray who is she?"

"Mrs. Massey came to the Court last evening to enquire after Maria, and was speaking of her. She is a Miss West—Jane West. A 'superior party,' as Mrs. Massey put it; and she is an adept at needlework—plain and fine—and can do millinery and dressmaking, and would be glad to get employment at ladies' houses. From these accomplishments, and from Mrs. Massey's description of her as 'quite the lady in her little ways,' I should imagine she is an ex-lady's-maid, who has got tired of service."

"She will soon find out her mistake," said practical Mrs. Grale. "A woman had need earn a very good income to get the comforts she enjoys in a master's house. But that is a useful person to know about, Mary Anne. We must not forget her."

"I wonder why she hit on Dering, as her field for enterprise," said Mary Anne, thoughtfully.

"She'll have some tie here, new or old," observed Mrs. Grale, shrewdly. "It is marvellous what a little thing makes a person draw to a place. I've known it to be a grave, and I've known it to be a pleasant holiday spent years before."

"And sometimes a place attracts because it has no tie and is out of the way," said George. His face looked grave. He was not thinking of Miss West the sewing woman then.

Mrs. Grale shook her head. "That place would be hard to find," she said. "It is my belief that if we want to get out of the way, and go to a desert island, the first wreck would cast a cousin or an old neighbour at our feet, that is if he was not there before us. But it seems easy to lose sight of what we don't want to lose."

George thought the last remark must apply to her son. "Have you heard from Alny again to-day?" he asked, as he rose to leave.

"Heard again to-day!—why, we have not heard at all," answered Mrs. Grale, in the haste of impulse.

George paused. "Oh, I thought—I understood that a letter had come to you from him from Scotland," he said, glancing at Mary Anne.

Mrs. Grale saw no cause to be reticent on the subject now that all was known to her husband. "No," she said, "we've had no letter—at least, from Alny. I heard that a box addressed to him, to be kept till called for, was waiting for him at a Scotch station, and I've had a telegram about it. That's all, Mr. Vivian."

"Then, do I understand you to imply that you have not heard yet from Allan—and that you do not know whether he is gone to Scotland or not?"

"That is so: but I'm looking for a letter from him by every post that comes in now," Mrs. Grale answered.

George Vivian bade the ladies adieu and went away, feeling rather uneasy. If truly nothing had been heard or was known of Allan, why it brought back to his mind that curious thing whispered to Stephen by Brice the gardener.

Meanwhile the rumour had been stopped in the bud by the positive assertion of Mr. Vivian himself, made to more than one person, that Allan Grale was in Scotland, and had written to his friends from thence.

For the next day or two Mr. Grale looked like a man preoccupied with his inward thoughts. He passed the greater portion of his time at the works and was but little at home. His wife and daughter supposed he was unusually busy—as a man making wealth rapidly by his own exertions must occasionally be.

On the third day, the box from Corrabuin was brought to the counting-house at the Mills. Mr. Grale's heart gave a great thump when he saw the porter carrying it into the counting-house. Somehow, possibly because the box was directed to Mr. Allan Grale and

he was away, none of the clerks had cared to sign the railway receipt book, and it was brought in and laid before Mr. Grale himself. He hastily signed it, directing that the box should be taken to his private room.

A curious feeling—as if all eyes were watching him, and anything he did might be significant—deterred him from straightway following it there. He went to and fro, giving orders and overlooking ledgers for more than half an hour.

Then he went into his retreat. There stood the box. It evidently had two or three coverings, the outer one being of coarse canvas, rather neatly sewn up. The station-master's redirection had been stuck on over the original address. But it had been done in a swift official manner, and with a little care the label readily came away. Beneath it was a card much more laboriously affixed, and bearing the words—

"Allan Grale, Esq., Corrabuin Station, N. B.—To wait till called for."

Mr. Grale asked himself whose handwriting that was? He had certainly seen it before.

He stood meditating for a few minutes, and then he got out his pocket-book, and took from it two papers which he unfolded, and held beside the label.

"Yes—that's it," he said, with a quick wag of his head. "The same hand wrote it all."

One of those papers was that note of Edgar Vivian's, inviting Allan to meet him at the Black Pool, which had been found in Allan's bedroom after his departure. What was the other?

Mr. Grale took scissors and ripped off the canvas cover. Then there was a thick brown paper wrapping, and last of all, one of soft woollen material. This careful packing was somewhat explained when the box came to view at last. For it was no common concern made of wood or tin, but a dainty Chinese box, its black ground bright with figures in blue and red, and tarnished gilt.

Mr. Grale took it up in his hands. It was quite light. But how to get into it? There was no keyhole—there was no visible lid or door or slide. This mysterious box had seemingly been constructed to keep a secret.

He must break it open. And he could not do this without some noise.

He looked at his watch. In half an hour, the clerks would be gone to dinner. He must wait till then.

But first he must secure some instrument suited to his purpose; something, not clumsy, which yet could give a sharp and decided blow.

It occurred to him that he had sometimes seen such an implement lying about in the counting-house. He had taken it up, asking what it was, and somebody had answered that it was a watchmaker's hammer. It seemed to him that it might be the very thing.

He went into the outer room and looked about him.

"Are you searching for anything, sir?" asked Mr. Mawson.

Mr. Grale stated his wish, and all the clerks rose and looked in all sorts of possible and impossible places. They all remembered the tool, but nobody knew to whom it had belonged, and nobody had seen it for some days. Mr. Wilton suggested that it might have been the property of a man who had recently been mending the clock in the mill, that it might have been accidentally brought into the counting-house, and then have been reclaimed by its owner when his job was done. Meanwhile, the office boy, discovering the sort of instrument his master required, went down to the tool-box and found something of a similar nature, which he tendered in its stead, and Mr. Grale took it back with him.

Mawson and Smith trooped off punctually enough, but zealous Mr. Wilton stayed pottering about so long that Mr. Grale thought he never would go. However, the door closed behind him at last, and at the very instant Mr. Grale locked his own.

Mr. Grale was in no mood to be influenced by the mere dainty prettiness of the article which baffled him. But he turned it about, and instinctively went to work on the bottom, where no pattern was. The box had a strength beyond its appearance, but it yielded at last, and its contents were within his grasp.

He scattered them on the table. Little enough were they to look at. Packets of letters. He took up one and sneered. He took up another and groaned heavily. Two or three small parcels: he opened them slowly, almost timidly, as if they might contain something which would sting—not his hands, but may be his heart!

The clerks came clattering back in due time. By-and-by the master was wanted. Mr. Mawson knocked at his door. No answer. He thought he was out, so tried the handle to make sure. It was locked. Yes, the master was certainly out, and the fact was announced accordingly.

Perhaps the clerks were a little noisier than Mr. Grale generally heard them. Perhaps they made some unusually audible remarks about their salaries and their hours, and their grievances of many kinds; for they all looked aghast, when nearly two hours later, the lock of that inner door was slowly turned, and Mr. Grale came forth.

Mawson and Smith bent down over their desks with supererogatory industry. Good Mr. Wilton, innocent of any indiscretion, looked up at his master and wondered what could have happened.

"I suppose there must be a day when old age begins," thought that worthy man. "If ever Mr. Grale wants to know the date of his, I shall be able to tell him."

CHAPTER XXII.

TAKING COUNSEL.

WHERE did Mr. Grale go that evening? Straight to the house of Dr. Palmer. He needed a true and trustworthy man with whom he could consult.

He knew that Dr. Palmer was this, and that he could be just and patient on behalf of a friend: and he knew that those who will not condone a wrong for selfish considerations are the first to forgive and forget it for generous ones.

As for Dr. Palmer, when Mr. Grale's card was brought to him in his surgery, he felt something like a twinge of remorse. The Doctor had thought regretfully of the old manufacturer ever since Mary Anne had brought him the message of conciliation; and he had regretted not to have responded to it.

"If he has come on this business again," thought the Doctor, as he went towards the dining-room, where his visitor awaited him, "or if he leads to the subject in anyway, I will propose that Charles Carr shall go back for a few days, just to prove that there is no ill-feeling on either side."

But the moment he saw Mr. Grale, he saw he was speaking to one who had received some great blow, under which he was staggering, however calmly he might try to bear it. The Doctor's cheerful expression changed to one of concern.

Mr. Grale went through the ordinary formalities of greeting and even commented on the weather, which gave him as much to say as an English November can. But Dr. Palmer knew that something else would come soon.

"Doctor," he said presently. "I dare say that before now, you have been taken into people's confidence on subjects not altogether connected with your own profession."

"It has been so," said Dr. Palmer, rather cautiously.

"One has sometimes to speak of health to one's lawyer," pursued Mr. Grale, "so that one may well speak of family affairs to one's physician."

"I shall be happy to give you any help I can, sir."

Mr. Grale was fumbling in his pocket-book. He produced a piece of paper, which he put on the table before the Doctor.

"Will you tell me if you know that handwriting?" he asked.

It was the label under whose direction that Chinese box had travelled to Corrabuin. Dr. Palmer looked at it with some surprise.

"Yes," he said, readily. "That is the younger Vivian's writing—Edgar Vivian."

"Mr. Grale leaned his elbow on the table, and looked earnestly into the Doctor's face.

"You once thought me rash in certain suspicions," he said, slowly. "I own now I was wrong—but I was not rash; at least not according to my own light. Now I want to ask your advice as to how I am to proceed in a great difficulty—or I may be rash again."

"You must not be so humble as that, Mr. Grale," said the Doctor, really touched by something in his old neighbour's face.

"I am not humble," Mr. Grale asserted. "But I want a bit of business well done; and when that's the case, I'm too good a business man to stick to it myself when there are those who may do it better. I suppose, Doctor, you know my son is away from home?"

"Yes."

"Anything more?" asked Mr. Grale, rather bitterly.

"People say you and he have had a quarrel," admitted Dr. Palmer. "It will happen sometimes, you know, with young men and their fathers."

"Allan and I have had no quarrel this time," said the elder man, in a low strange voice. "I may have some idea"—he paused—"perhaps a very good idea—why he has gone. But I never knew he was going—I did not know when he went—I do not know where he is."

"Is he not in Scotland? I was told that he had written to you from thence—or to his mother."

"He has not written at all. We have reason to suppose he may be in Scotland—or on his way thither. But a matter has arisen which I must get at the bottom of. That young Vivian seems clearly to have directed a box to Allan since he went away. We heard it was waiting at Corrabuin station, and I'll tell you how." And Mr. Grale related in detail the story of Mrs. Gibson's letter, of his wife's alarm, and her futile attempts at secrecy. Then he went on.

"I don't allow his poor mother to suspect that I am so deep in darkness concerning Alny's departure and movements as I really am. She believes in the quarrel-theory—I'm sure I do not know who started it—and expects a letter from him daily. I've not let her know that I have had this box sent to me. But what I want to say to you, Doctor, is—this looks as if Edgar Vivian knew of my son's going off, and where he is likely to be."

"There would not be anything very strange in that," returned Dr. Palmer. "The young men were always friendly. It would be more singular if Allan had gone away without taking anyone into his confidence: unless he went unexpectedly. When was it that he went?"

Mr. Grale shook his head. "It was one Tuesday evening," he said. "It chanced that none of us were at home to dinner except Allan. I was detained at the Works; my wife and daughter had driven over to make a call on Lady Laura Bond and she persuaded them to stay. Allan eat his dinner quickly, James says, and seemed to be in deep thought. He went out afterwards and he never came back again."

Dr. Palmer took out his pocket-book, and referred to an entry in it.

"It was Tuesday night, the 20th of October, I think," he said.

Mr. Grale started. "How do you know that?" he asked, in bewilderment.

"Because I saw him that night—or, rather, close upon the small hours of the following morning," answered the doctor, "for it was at a quarter to one o'clock. I saw him hastening along the Carstow Road."

"A quarter to one o'clock!" repeated Mr. Grale. "He left home between six and seven: say seven, at the latest. Where had he been between whiles? Did you meet him? Did you speak to him?"

"No, I only saw him from a window. Mrs. Enderby was ill and I was with her. While I waited, I whiled away the time by looking from the window of the next room; it was a bright, moonlight night, and I saw Allan pass, walking towards Carstow."

"Are you sure it was he?"

"Well, not quite positively sure," admitted the doctor. "He came into sight so suddenly, and it seemed so unlikely, you see—but I felt no doubt at the time. He had no great-coat on, though he generally wore that light one of his at night."

"He had that same light one on when he left home that evening; James says so," spoke Mr. Grale. "A quarter to one o'clock, you say?"

"Yes. I took out my watch and looked at it, wondering where he could be going to at so late an hour."

Mr. Grale sat back in his chair. "I wonder whether it was Allan?' he said, after a pause.

"I think it must have been."

"Any way, it is a sort of clue—and I have had none to go upon at all until this news came about the box that was waiting at Corrabuin. I don't care about his coming back yet, doctor; but I confess I want to hear from him—to ease his mother. To her it has looked just as though he were lost."

A curious feeling at the moment took Dr. Palmer: he thought of what his daughter Agnes had imparted to him. Lost! What could have induced Maria Vivian to take up that dread notion?

"Oh, he is not lost," said the doctor cheerily. "In saying so, Mr. Grale, you mean that he has been lost to you since the night he left his home."

"Absolutely lost. He might as well never have existed, for aught we have heard, or known of him since," replied Mr. Grale.

There ensued a silence. The elder man broke it.

"Do you think you would object to sound Edgar Vivian about this for me, Dr. Palmer?"

The Doctor looked up from his reverie. "Mr. Grale, I will do

anything for you that you wish me to do," he said warmly. "But why not enquire of Edgar Vivian yourself?"

"I don't know about that. If these two young men, he and my son, have got into any trouble together, and are keeping it secret, I am the last person they'd disclose it to."

"I do not think Edgar Vivian can have done that," remarked the Doctor. "He is more to be depended on than George."

"Perhaps so. But I have not so high an opinion of him as you have," said Mr. Grale. "When a young man begins to borrow money on the quiet, I'm afraid there's generally something wrong behind."

"Borrow money on the quiet! But who has been doing that?"

"Edgar Vivian," replied Mr. Grale. "Remember, Dr. Palmer, I am speaking to you in the strictest confidence."

"I should remember that without your reminding me: this is all in confidence. Are you sure that he has done it?"

Mr. Grale laughed slightly. "It was my money he borrowed, Doctor. The first time, he borrowed it through Allan; that is, Allan asked me to lend it him—and I lent it—gave it to Allan for him. The next time Edgar wrote to me himself, asking me to repeat my loan and give it, as before, to Allan. I wouldn't do it; it was rather too much, I thought, coming so close upon the other."

Dr. Palmer was thinking all kind of thoughts. "When was this?" he asked.

"The first time—that which I responded to—was just before the General's illness. The second time—when I would not respond—was soon after it."

"How much did he borrow?"

"Fifty pounds. And it was fifty he asked for again. When his note came—and I think it was the very last day I saw Allan—I told my son I would not have anything to do with it. I told him also that I believed the money was for the two of them; that they were in league with each other and had got into some mess conjointly. And I think they had."

"What did your son answer to that?—Did he press for the money?"

"No. I don't recollect that he made any particular answer, or say whether my surmise was right or wrong. He did not press for the money at all."

Dr. Palmer knew not what to think. "I suppose you did not keep that note of Edgar Vivian's, Mr. Grale?"

"Yes I did: and I have it about me now," said Mr. Grale, as he produced the note and laid it down, open, beside the address on the table. It was brief: considering the favour requested, it was almost curt. "Sometimes I fancy, that had I responded to it and given the money, Allan would not have gone away; it might have saved him. How far Edgar Vivian ——"

Mr. Grale stopped suddenly. A gloom was gathering on his face.

"Mr. Grale," said Dr. Palmer, "you have taken me into your confidence, will you forgive me if I approach a point on which you perhaps wish to be reticent. I see you have some cause to be displeased with your son, and I can understand that you may easily associate Edgar Vivian in this displeasure. You know more than I do—I only want to make one enquiry—is there anybody else whom you suspect of being mixed up in this unhappy mystery?"

Mr. Grale hesitated. "Yes," he said, slowly. "Yes, one other person. Nobody whom you know. Nobody who has ever been heard of in Dering."

"Man or woman?"

"Man."

They sat in silence. Dr. Palmer revolved what he had heard.

"I will see Edgar Vivian for you, Mr. Grale, and hear what he says. Perhaps he may refuse to speak. If the young men held some grave confidence together, he may not consider himself at liberty to do so, but I'll do my best. May I say that you are not at enmity with your son—that you do not wish to harm him—that there was no quarrel?"

"Dr. Palmer, I assure you that not one angry word passed between me and my son before he went away. I knew no reason for any—then," he added significantly.

"And you do now?"

"Now? How can I avoid being angry with him now, keeping us, as he does, in this suspense?" retorted Mr. Grale; which, the Doctor fancied, was an evasive answer. "But you may be sure I would not harm my own son. What I want is to know what has become of him. Let him write to his mother and ease her mind. Tell that to Edgar Vivian."

Dr. Palmer nodded. "I have always liked Edgar the best of the two brothers, I have always found him straightforward and honourable, and it pains me to hear this. I cannot help thinking ——"

"By the way, though," interrupted Mr. Grale, with sudden remembrance, "I've got another note of his in my pocket. Edgar Vivian left it at our house for Allan not above an hour or two before Allan disappeared. In it he asks Allan to meet him at the Black Pool, and ——"

"What?" almost shouted Dr. Palmer, a disagreeable idea starting into his mind.

"Here it is. I don't know whether it can have anything to do with the matter—or whether when Allan went out that night it was to go to the Black Pool to keep the appointment. I would not show this note to my wife; she hates the very name of the Black Pool. The other day she began to tell me of a bad dream she had, connected with that Black Pool and with Allan too, the night he went away, and wanted to make out that her sister in Scotland had some such another dream the same night, but I stopped her,—I would not listen to it. Women are so foolish!"

"This note is undated," said Dr. Palmer, who had been looking at it while he listened.

"Yes," answered Mr. Grale; "and therefore I do not know whether the appointment was meant to be kept that day or the next."

"And you do not know whether it was kept, or not?"

"No; but Edgar Vivian must know. Will you ask him?"

"I will," said the Doctor emphatically. He was glancing at the two notes while he spoke, turning them about to the light, comparing them with each other and with the label.

"Do you know, Mr. Grale, I am not sure that these notes were written by the same person," he said.

"The writing is the same," said Mr. Grale peremptorily. "Look at the formation of every letter!"

"It is the same—yet not the same," objected Dr. Palmer. "I have seen a similar resemblance—yet a difference—between the handwritings of two people of widely different character, who had happened to be taught by the same writing master."

"And that label is like them both," returned Mr. Grale. "I think you must be rather fanciful, Doctor. Everybody's writing varies a little at times. Now to give a test: if you were sure that those notes were written by two people, which of them would you say wrote the label?"

Dr. Palmer looked carefully from one to the other. "The label seems so like them both that it might have been written by either," he said. "And it is carefully and formally written as labels are, while one of the notes, at least, has been evidently hurriedly scribbled. But as it stands, certainly that label most resembles the more carefully written note asking for the loan."

"Now I should have said, decidedly the other way," cried Mr. Grale, who had shared in Dr. Palmer's scrutiny. "You are thinking of forgery, Dr. Palmer, because it has been suggested to your mind by that unfortunate affair up at the mills. That's the harm a prepossession gives us. It gets into a fixed idea. My mother had a servant who stole tea, and she kept it locked up ever afterwards, and the others stole everything else. Besides there's an object in forging cheques, and it's just a name and done with. I'm sure these notes and the label have been written by one hand—and that is Edgar Vivian's."

Mr. Grale gathered them up as he spoke and returned them to his pocket-book. He then said good-night to Dr. Palmer, thanked him as they shook hands, and went home.

Dr. Palmer sat down again and plunged into thought. Things were assuming a somewhat curious aspect; and he told himself that the one thing of all which he least liked to glance at, was the total disappearance (for it seemed nothing less) of Allan Grale.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DID IT RUN IN THE FAMILY?

Mrs. Grale, having once made up her mind that she was sure to get news of Allan pretty soon, became herself again. Despair had given way to suspense. She wanted the days to fly past till they should bring her the news she was longing for. Her recipe for this—not a bad one—was to fill them with more work than they could conveniently hold. The worst of it was, the whole household got involved by her restless energy, without sharing its impulse.

Mrs. Grale was a woman who always had many household plans laid by, cut and dried as it were, to be taken up and carried out on any suitable opportunity. At present, these included a fresh set of drawing-room coverings, one or two new bed-hangings, and a general replenishing of linen, both household and personal. Mrs. Grale never felt properly provided unless she had in stock a double-set of all things; one in use, the other, never yet "broken into." Humbly as she had been reared, she was in these respects fastidious and large-minded.

"Alny never did like that last drawing-room cretonne," she said to Mary Anne one day, "and when he comes back it will be a pleasant surprise to find a new one."

"Alny never liked coverings of any kind," replied Mary Anne.

This conversation took place in the linen closet, where Mrs. Grale was sitting. It was a long, low room at the stair-head. Mrs. Grale never realised her prosperity so much as in that room of plentiful stores. The contents of the cupboards and presses lay strewn around her, those in present use passing rapidly through her hands, some to be condemned to the rag-bag, others to be stored for possible invalid use, and others, again, to be bestowed among Mrs. Grale's numerous dependents. These last were never given away till they had been put into thorough repair in the housekeeper's room. "Girls may not know how to patch and darn when they come to me, but they do before they go," she would remark. Mary Anne was occasionally pressed into the service. Her duty was to sit with a memorandum book, and make a note of the figures her mother gave her.

"We shall need a great many new things this time," said Mrs. Grale, as if quite elated at the thought. She often grudged money for greenhouse flowers, for expensive periodicals and photographs, and so forth, thinking how far such sums would have gone among the needs of her girlish days. But she never grudged money for her drapery: it was not mere linen she was buying; it was the ideal of her youth!

"Yes, a great many things," she repeated. "There's five shirts of your father's only fit to give away—that will mean five new ones. Put down five new shirts, Mary Anne, and that's the last of the sewed

under-linen now. Add up the numbers, child, and see how many new garments there will be altogether, great and small."

Mary Anne dotted her pencil up the page. "Thirty-seven," she replied. "Of course, that is not counting the pocket-handkerchiefs."

"Thirty-seven! That's among four people—so it's an average of nine and a quarter each. That's the best of keeping up a good supply, one never seems to wear through one's things and run short. Do you know, Mary Anne, I think we might employ that Miss West, whom Mr. Vivian spoke about the other day. He said she wished to get needlework at ladies' houses."

Mary Anne had no objection. She thought she should like to get a closer view of the "yellow woman."

"I'll engage her by the week," said Mrs. Grale. "And if I find her capable, I'll take the risk of letting her try her hand on the drawing-room furniture covers, instead of having in a regular upholstress. I'll send Susan round to Mrs. Massey's for her now, while all the things are about; she can then see the sort of work she'll have to do. I suppose she's sure to be honest and respectable."

"You can ask her for a reference, mamma."

"Yes; but that's often a mere matter of form," deplored Mrs. Grale. "I have good references with my servants—and yet things go somehow."

Mary Anne laughed. "You fancy that partly, mamma. It is a fashion with most famous house-wives."

"I know what I know," returned her mother, curtly, who was thinking of her great loss, the diamond cross.

"Articles that get lost are often found again," carelessly remarked Mary Anne.

"I know there are some very queer things about losing and finding," admitted Mrs. Grale. "I knew of a very strange one when I was a girl. It's not the sort of story one talks about, for people only think one is making it up. They cannot see the force of little things that we see ourselves."

"I think you must have been very superstitious people in your part of the country, mamma."

"There you go!" exclaimed Mrs. Grale. "That's just what I say! Before I've uttered a word, you are ready to think there's superstition in the story: which there is not. There is only mystery."

"Tell it to me, then," said Mary Anne. "I like mystery best without superstition."

"Then you like it best with wickedness," retorted her mother, rather severely; "for where there is mystery, if there isn't the one, there must be the other somewhere—somebody's wickedness."

"Please tell me the story," pleaded Mary Anne.

"My mother," began Mrs. Grale, circumstantially—"that's your grandmother, you know; only you never did know her. Ah, me! how proud she'd have been to see me sitting in a room like this

My mother had a curious old book, called 'Rowe's Letters from the Dead to the Living.'"

"There!" said Mary Anne. "There's the superstition beginning!"

Mrs. Grale gave an impatient gesture. "It was a good book," she went on, "full of moral, and it was bound in rough black leather and had brown edges, which were stained with age—I remember it as if I'd seen it yesterday. My mother kept it in a lock-fast bureau, in the top drawer at the left-hand side, and it was only got out now-and-then for a treat. And one day, when she went to the drawer, the book was not there."

"It had not been put back again the last time it was taken out," said matter-of-fact Mary Anne.

"It had," returned Mrs. Grale. "We looked everywhere for that book, and it was nowhere; and we made a terrible fuss over the loss, telling all our friends. And every time my mother looked in that drawer, she looked at that empty place and sighed."

"That would not bring back the book," laughed Mary Anne.

"But it seemed as if it did," returned Mrs. Grale, triumphantly. "It was full a year after, that one day when she happened to open the drawer, she gave a little cry, and I ran to her, and there was the book in its old place!"

"Somebody had borrowed it who had not chosen to ask its loan," decided Mary Anne, after a pause. "And they were honest enough to put it back when done with—which is more than some book borrowers do."

"It may have been that," admitted Mrs. Grale, "though the drawer was a lock-fast one. My mother used to say it seemed as if we'd been all bewitched, or else the drawer had."

Susan, who had been despatched to Mrs. Massey's for Miss West, came back with her. She had met the needlewoman going off to the station to catch a train, but she had time to stop to see Mrs. Grale.

Miss West could undertake any work Mrs. Grale chose to give her. Voluntarily she tendered the name and address of a London lawyer and his wife as her references. Quite respectfully she said that she had some matters of business to attend to just now, which necessitated her journeying occasionally to London, and she could only agree to work at Moorland House on these conditions.

There was something not unprepossessing about the young woman. If there was a singular chilly dignity in her manner, there was the right shade of deference too. She could never have been pretty, but there was a good deal of fine marking and strong character in her pale worn face, and her dress was quite in keeping with herself—plain and dark, with a bonnet fitting closely. The yellow cloak, for once, was not upon her; it was carried on her arm as an extra wrap.

"Quite a superior person," pronounced Mrs. Grale, on her departure. "If she has been a lady's maid, it was in some very good service."

"I don't think she has been," said Mary Anne; "she has not a

maid's manner; she has been accustomed to act on a will of her own."

"Well," said Mrs. Grale, "there's nothing more to be done here to-day. I think I'll leave all the things lying as they are, and lock the room door instead of the cupboards and presses."

"Always locking up!" laughed Mary Anne.

"Always locking up," assented Mrs. Grale to herself, as she went off to her own chamber. "And yet, when we missed that cross the other day Mr. Grale was ready to blame me for carelessness—if I had not left my places unlocked, I had left my keys about, he said. As if I should!—— Well—to—be—sure!"

The last words came out with a jerk, as Mrs. Grale stood still at her bedroom door, self-convicted. For there before her eyes, on the toilet-table lay her little bunch of special keys, among which was that of her jewel-case.

"I could have declared I took them from the pocket of my evening dress last night, and transferred them to the pocket of that I now have on," she said to herself. "Dear, dear, dear! I must be losing my own head, and that's a worse loss than all the jewellery in the world!"

Her next thought was that she had better look through her jewel case. If there was any dishonest person about her, who had made use of her keys, how many more trinkets might not have gone! Opening the case, Mrs. Grale looked jealously through its contents.

No; everything within the box seemed all right. There was the empty case where the diamond cross had been. Mrs. Grale took it up dreamily. Its spring was not stiff to-day, and it flew open at a touch.

She uttered one low "oh," and her heart stood still. Then it went on with a bound.

There lay the diamond cross, flashing in the rays which the wintry sun sent across the room.

Mrs. Grale collected her thoughts with difficulty—she had a vague feeling that this sort of thing might run in her family!—like a banshee, or second sight. But she was aware of a faint odour. She raised the little case and sniffed it gingerly. Oil had been applied to the spring to make it work more easily—scented macassor oil, surely taken from a bottle which stood on the toilet table.

"Well, whoever has been concerned in this business," reflected Mrs. Grale, "is certainly cool enough! Shall I dare tell Mr. Grale how it happened? Though it has ended so well that I'm sure it has been worth leaving one's keys about—for once. It *must* run in the family."

(*To be continued.*)

GEOFFREY SAUNDERS' WIFE.

I.

DAY after day, in the storm and sunshine of fourteen years, Geoffrey Saunders had spent under the very shadow of the square Norman tower of Saintbury Church; sitting at his work among smooth slabs of marble and blocks of stone; dreaming of future fame and fortune, and passing from youth to manhood with the dreams unfulfilled: tied down by duty to the narrow aims and cares of life in an out-of-the-way country village.

With all the hope and courage of youth, he dare risk nothing where his brother Maurice was concerned. He could never resolve to leave the gentle, delicate lad, who, with all his passion for the beautiful, and vague longings after the good life never offered him, had found no more congenial employment than that of carrying bricks and mixing mortar for a small country builder.

From the day when the lads of seventeen and fifteen had followed their father, and, at no long interval, their mother, to the grave, Geoffrey, as far as a brother could, had stood between Maurice and the world. He had shared his hardships, cheered the monotony of his daily life, and encompassed him with a strong self-forgetting love, which had been accepted with the gentle, unconscious selfishness of a clinging, affectionate nature.

In spite of his dreams and aspirations, Maurice had been happy enough, living with Geoffrey in the little two-roomed cottage under Chascott Woods, and walking with him, morning and evening, along the winding road which led to the village where their work lay, until Lily Thorne's fair face and golden head had come between them; and for the sake of that fair face Maurice would have given up even his brother's love. He had no need to make the sacrifice. Geoffrey had never given her a thought, and Maurice she treated with a soft disdain which drove him soon into a hasty questioning of his fate.

Lily, however, had other ambitions than to become Maurice Saunders' wife, and he received a gentle, but unqualified dismissal. It was not that she considered him too much her inferior, for, though her father occupied a small farm, successive losses, and the expenses of a large family, gave him, year after year, a greater struggle to make both ends meet. Lily was taken from the school at which she had been placed, and apprenticed to the village dressmaker. The amount of education she had received, combined with her innate sweetness and refinement, had rendered her far superior to the other village girls, and doubly attractive in her suitor's eyes.

Maurice, however, acquiesced in his fate more quietly than Geoffrey had dared to hope; and, after the first evening, when, in a few

passionate words, he confided his disappointment to his brother, was silent on the subject.

But with that winter came failing health and energy; sleepless nights, and days that had to be spent by the fireside. Geoffrey's heart sank sometimes when he glanced up from his book at the white face and languid figure opposite him. Before Spring came there was fresh cold caught, and less strength to fight against it; and Geoffrey was kneeling beside the bed one night, holding both the feeble hands in his, and taking his last look into those gentle dark eyes in passionate grief he could no longer conceal.

"You'll tell her, Geoffrey, I loved her always," Maurice whispered brokenly. "But it was best she wouldn't have me. I couldn't have made her happy. If only she doesn't marry that Jack Hyde. He would soon neglect her and break her heart, and I shouldn't rest in my grave. Geoff, promise me you'll ask her yourself. You'll take care of her, and make her happy for my sake."

Geoffrey Saunders had never yet withstood his brother's pleading voice and wistful eyes, and he did not now.

"She can't care for a rough fellow like me, dear lad," he answered, gently. "But if it is any comfort to you, I'll promise to try and win her love."

"You will win it, Geoff."

The smile of perfect rest and peace that crossed Maurice Saunders' face was lingering there still when his brother covered it, and shut out the bright winter sunlight with which a golden dawn was flooding the world. His last earthly care had not been for the brother who had loved him so tenderly and truly all his life, but for the fair girl who had given him nothing.

The funeral over, Geoffrey went back to his place in old Jonathan Heritage's yard, close under the churchyard wall, and set to work gravely and silently on the simple granite cross to the memory of Maurice Saunders.

"Should think it makes him feel rather unked to be a starin' at that grave all day," his master remarked once in his hearing, and Geoffrey turned round sharply.

"What difference can it make? The whole world is one great graveyard, go where you will." A sentiment that to the unimaginative mind of old Jonathan savoured of radicalism and dissent, and therefore deserved no answer. But Geoffrey had spoken a truth which most of us experience some time in our lives.

Spring brightened into Summer, Summer faded to Autumn, and Autumn paled to Winter, and Geoffrey put off his wooing from day to day. At least a year must elapse before he had a right to fulfil the promise made to his brother, he told himself, sternly dismissing the thought that these fresh duties and responsibilities had put an end to all his plans of study and self-culture in a wider sphere, and the dreams of a fame which might follow. He made sundry efforts to regard

Lily Thorne as his future wife; stopped to speak to her when they met in the village; and on Sundays let his eyes wander over the rows of heads to where she sat in church, her sweet, serious, spiritual face bent over her book.

Lily, on her part, showed no displeasure at his approaches towards friendliness. Her secret admiration for the manly young fellow was stronger than her notions of gentility: and, in addition to this, she felt an increasing dislike to her occupation. The toil and confinement of a dressmaker's life were beginning to tell upon her delicate constitution, and in escaping from the necessity of this hard earning of her daily bread, the small sacrifice of position was nothing.

But the year might have lengthened into two, had it not been for the news which reached him one day in passing that Lily Thorne was going away to London to a "place." "Situation" was a refinement of terms unknown to the good people of Saintbury, a school board and an energetic high church young vicar notwithstanding.

The time had come to fulfil his promise, and Geoffrey Saunders was not a man to excuse himself the performance of a duty.

That same evening he left his work earlier than usual, and went round a quarter of a mile on her way home. Down Chascott Lane it was almost dark between the high, overhanging hedges, and he fancied her glance of shy pleasure when he came up with her might have been due to the satisfaction she felt at having a companion along the lonely road. Their conversation, it is true, was brief and somewhat constrained; but Geoffrey felt when he had parted from her and gone home to his solitary supper that the ice was broken, and that there would be less difficulty next time. He knew that his wooing must of necessity be a short one, for Lily had told him that in a week she was to set out on her new life in London. On the third evening that he turned away from work to walk with her through the fir-spinney and along the lane, he had determined to learn his fate.

The two walked on silently in the mud and wet that gleamed coldly in the pale yellow light the February sun had left behind, he thinking, as he glanced down at the small sweet face at his side, how passionately Maurice had loved that fair face, and that a man might indeed rejoice if he could win it for his own. He spoke at last when they reached his cottage door in answer to Lily's good-night.

"Wait a minute, Lily. Don't go yet; I have something to say to you, first."

Geoffrey slid down the basket of tools from his broad shoulders, and took both her small hands in his.

"It's a question I've been wanting to ask you for some time past, and now you're talking of going away, I can't wait any longer. Will you stay if I ask you? Will you be my wife, Lily?"

She had dreamed of it, and hoped for it—this question; but when it was asked she drew her hands away quickly, with a little sigh. He took them again, and waited for an answer.

"Oh, Geoffrey, do you love me as well as that?"

"I do," he said. "And I promised Maurice before he died I would try and make you happy, if you could give me the right. And you will, Lily?"

She let him take her into his arms and hold her there. While the yellow light died out of the western sky, a pale star gleamed out above the dark line of the Chascott Woods, and the night wind came sweeping the hills and swaying the leafless branches above their heads noisily.

A long, clear, melodious whistle came ringing out of the darkness behind them. Lily released herself, and sped away like a frightened fawn, and Geoffrey took up his basket and turned into his house, answering Jack Hyde's cheering "good-night" and sly laugh rather curtly.

Jack Hyde, the handsome, reckless young under-keeper, had received his final dismissal from Lily some six months before. He did not fail, therefore, to report the fact that she and Geoffrey Saunders were walking together. It was all over the village next morning, and the two were elevated to the position of hero and heroine of the hour. Lily had no shame now in waiting till Geoffrey's work was done that they might walk home together, and no misgivings at his taciturn moods and stern gravity of manner.

Once, in the dusk of a windy March evening, she ventured into the yard to wait while Geoffrey put a finishing touch to the wings of a cherub he was carving on a head-stone. Saintbury taste still ran in the direction of cherubs and funeral urns. Lily came up to him and leaned over his shoulder to watch the strong hands grasping mallet and chisel so firmly, till Geoffrey could feel her soft breath on his cheek.

"How lovely that little angel's face is, Geoffrey," she said. "I should like to have a stone like that put up to me."

"Should you?" he answered, abstractedly.

"Yes, that and a text. Why didn't you carve a text on poor Maurice's stone? He would have liked it better, may be."

"Why, it can't make any difference to him now. What would you have me put?"

"I don't know." Lily drew back and turned away her head. "Here's old Jonathan coming. How long shall you be, Geoffrey?"

"He ought to ha' done now," interrupted old Heritage's thin, reedy voice, as he came out of the shed into the open space: his thin, stooping figure, his hands wrapped up in his white apron, hair, clothes and face of a uniform dusty grey, and a broad channel of white dust inside the turned-up brim of his hat. "He ought to ha' done now; he'd sit there all night if I'd let him. And so you be agoin' to marry him, Lily Thorne?"

The old man turned to her with a twinkle in his eye, and Lily laughed and blushed for answer.

"Well, it be the way of all young women to take the first man as comes. I hope he'll do well by you, though too clever for me is Geoff Saunders; too clever by half. One of them chaps as thinks, because he can do a fair day's work and read his paper of a night, he's fit to govern the country."

Geoffrey laughed a little; and Lily hastened to take up the glove his master was in the habit of throwing down pretty frequently, in the vain endeavour to prove that he and his young journeyman were not on the best of terms.

"I know he's clever, Mr. Heritage, but he has too much sense to think that of himself."

"Good for him; he has to learn by experience, my dear; most on us has, specially when it comes to a man's rulin' his own house. But come along, and have a cup o' tea with the missus; she's wantin' to see you. Geoff 'll come too."

"No, not to-night; I must get home quickly. Lily, I'll come back for you in an hour or two. Good-night to you, master."

And Geoffrey, swinging his basket over his shoulder with a musical rattle of the tools, strode off. He was in no mood to encounter, good-humouredly, the attacks of old Jonathan's sharp tongue to-night. Lily looked after him, disappointed and reluctant.

Geoffrey went home more quickly than usual, the old battle between ambition and the claims of duty strong upon him. His promise to his lost brother had to be fought out again: and he sought the solitude and silence of his own fireside to put down once and for ever the old hopes and longings he must not bring into his future life. The vision of Lily's sweet face helped him to-night as it had never done before. It might be that in making her happy he would bring into his life that absolute content it had wanted hitherto.

II.

The Spring days were lengthening into Summer when Geoffrey Saunders brought his wife home to the little steep-roofed cottage under Chascott Woods, where he and Maurice had lived together the few brief years of the younger brother's manhood.

Weeks and months passed away; the Autumn glory of the Chascott Woods faded once more, and in Geoffrey Saunders' home the happy bride had sobered down into a grave and careful little housewife.

But there were no smiles and shy pleasure to welcome Geoffrey home now, and Lily's fair face was often pale and troubled, her step slow and languid. A simple country maiden she had never learnt the art of analysing her feelings, and could scarcely have explained even to herself the hunger and heartache that daily oppressed her, by admitting that Geoffrey was not all she had expected he would be. Kind and courteous in his stern, silent way he was always, but it was not the kindness and courtesy of a lover to the woman of his

choice ; and Lily, though she scarcely understood why, was none the less unhappy, wept silently over the fire sometimes when alone, and hid herself away from friends and acquaintances.

Her husband waited on her hand and foot, and never left her without a hasty kiss and farewell. But he would come at night to eat his supper and sit over his books in his old silent absorbed way, totally oblivious of all her little devices to attract his notice ; and responding once to some little wifely attention she paid him with so visible an effort that she never ventured it again. She argued little, or nothing, perhaps, from his chivalrous devotion to all her wants, his studied gentleness in speaking to her, or even his silence and preoccupation. Only knowing that she was unhappy and wanted something she had not, she drooped more and more, till there was little trace of Lily Thorne in Geoffrey Saunders' wife.

She had no one to whom she could go for sympathy and counsel, even if womanly pride would have allowed it. Her mother was a simple-minded woman, who would have but little patience with what she would consider Lily's foolish fancies ; and the sympathy of friends and neighbours would have been absolutely aggressive. Lily could not ask it, and carried a composed face and careless manner before the little world of Saintbury.

But Geoffrey could not fail to see at last his wife's failing health and spirits, and one morning questioned anxiously, "Was she ill?" Lily shook her head. "Unhappy? Had anything happened to trouble her?" No. Lily had no words to express her heartache, and only burst into tears.

Geoffrey moved a step or two from the doorway where he was standing.

"Have I done or said anything to pain you, Lily? Won't you tell me what's the matter?"

"There's nothing to tell," answered Lily, pettishly, from between her two hands.

"Nothing that you *will* tell, I suppose you mean? I don't like to see my wife crying over nothing."

Geoffrey spoke a little sternly, and waited a moment for an answer. But none came, and he went out into the drizzling November rain, hastily closing the door behind him, and Lily, with her face still hidden, did not see the look he turned to her. She got up slowly and went to the window, watching from behind the curtain his tall figure with shoulders squarely set and head thrown back, striding away into the darkness of the muddy lane ; recalling with a certain dangerous distinctness the look on Jack Hyde's handsome reckless face when he had bidden her good-bye. Geoffrey had never looked so—because —had he never loved her?

A deep painful flush stole slowly over her pale face, and slowly she crept back to her fire, and, sitting down there, laid her head on the table wearily. The agony of this new thought which had forced

itself upon her mind after so much groping in the dark, so much hitherto unaccountable pain, was almost more than she could bear. Geoffrey had loved her only for Maurice's sake, and married her to keep his promise. To a clinging and weakly, sensitive nature such as his young wife's, nothing could be more terrible. Believing herself unloved was unutterable loneliness and misery which would admit of no hope.

Geoffrey had in the meantime gone out to his day's work, oppressed with a vague sense of uneasiness and distrust. The recollection of his young wife's tears and unexplained trouble weighed upon him. Was he in any way to blame for it, he questioned. He should find it hard to forgive himself if it were so. Or had he made a terrible and fatal mistake in marrying Lily Thorne and thinking he could make her a happy wife?

Geoffrey drew a long deep breath and turned round, half unconsciously, to glance back down the lane to the hollow in the wood, where the little white-washed cottage he had just left gleamed like a patch of snow in a dark hedge-row. The casket that held the treasure he wore for another's sake.

Yielding to a sudden impulse he retraced his steps quickly, and in a few moments more was pausing on the threshold. He entered quietly. Lily stood at the table with her back to him, washing up the breakfast cups, the sleeves of her cotton gown turned back over her round, white, delicate arms, and a blue check apron pinned in front of her. The long dark eyelashes were drooping still, but there were no tears now in the soft grey eyes. Only a patient languor and weariness in the whole face and slightly stooping figure infinitely more pathetic than tears. Geoffrey's heart throbbed faster than was its wont, as he spoke.

"Lily."

She started a little, answering "Yes," without turning to look at him, and he moved a step nearer.

"I'm afraid I spoke a bit hard to you, just now. I didn't mean it, and I came back to say so."

"I know," she said, "and I didn't mind; it's all right, Geoffrey."

"Not if you're in any trouble, wife, and you won't tell me what ails you. Surely you aren't afraid to tell me, Lily?" Geoffrey leaned over the table a little, to look at her. "We ought to share everything now, eh?"

"I think I was a bit homesick. It's lonesome being by myself all day." Lily still kept her face averted.

"I know it is. I wish I were not obliged to leave for so long, but you mustn't talk of being homesick. This is your home now, you know. And it's something like a home since you came," added Geoffrey, glancing round with the air of a man well satisfied with his surroundings.

The bright colour came into Lily's face again, as she turned and

looked at him, a whole world of new hope and happiness shining in her eyes. She had been mistaken, then; he did care for her. But these new and strange emotions found no expression in words, and she only answered with something between a laugh and a sob: "Oh, I'm not a very good wife to you, Geoffrey, am I?"

Geoffrey's basket was placed on the table that he might take his wife into his arms and press his lips to hers with grave and unimpassioned tenderness, till Lily released herself, and he started once more to his work, well satisfied, and even light-hearted. He had atoned for his unconscious neglect, and Lily was happy. Women were such strange creatures, so easily moved to tears or laughter. He must be more careful in future, more attentive and studious of all her wants. So ran his reflections.

Lily was more than satisfied; happy again, and after a little while singing over her work. "I have been silly to fret; he *does* care for me, only it isn't his way to be always talking and noticing me," she said to herself; and she resolved to be more than ever assiduous in making his home attractive while she would make fewer demands on his attention.

But with the Spring, a change came into the even tenour of Geoffrey Saunders' life. A change totally unforeseen, and so startling in its consequences to the sober, plodding workman he had become, he hardly realised at first that it was placing in his hands a means to the end of his long cherished ambition.

It was a cold March evening, and he came in from work with hands chilled, and dark face flushed by the biting east wind, and sat down before the fire with his usual quiet greeting—"Well Lily, here I am again."

Lily, standing on tip-toe, reached down from the high mantel-shelf a long blue envelope, and stealing behind to look over his shoulder, read the letter he drew out. The stiff, clerkly handwriting was not difficult to decipher, but the intelligence conveyed was too surprising to be taken in at the first perusal.

"What does it mean?" asked Lily, breathlessly.

"I can't make it out yet; listen." And he read it again in an undertone.

"9, High Street, Hawksworth.

"Sir,—We have to inform you of the death of your late uncle, Mr. Job Saunders, of Hawksworth Hall, which took place at half past ten o'clock this morning. As sole surviving relative and heir to our late client, we await your instructions respecting the funeral, and remain, sir, your obedient servants, "Goff and Pritchard."

"I didn't know you had an uncle, or any relations at all, Geoffrey," said his wife, still puzzled.

"I never saw him," answered he, slowly. "He quarrelled with my father; over his marriage, I fancy; and I always thought he was dead

and gone years ago. Mr. Job Saunders of Hawksworth Hall! He must have got on in life."

"Perhaps he was very rich," suggested Lily, softly.

"We shall soon hear," returned Geoffrey. "I must go to-morrow and see the old man buried. It isn't very far away, you know."

"Shall you be gone long, Geoffrey?"

"Two or three days, may be. And, Lily, don't say anything to the neighbours, except that I'm gone out on business. It'll be time enough for them to know where I've been when I come back."

"Very well," assented Lily, with infinite faith in Geoffrey's wisdom.

"If you're lonely you can have one of your little sisters to stop with you," remarked her husband, after an interval of silence.

"I *shall* be lonely," answered Lily, with a pout and smile that would have turned many a cool head, and set many a brave heart throbbing.

"I shall not be away long, dear," said Geoffrey kindly; and Lily sighed.

Before daylight next morning he was gone, and Lily, like a dutiful little wife, was refusing any crumbs of information to an inquisitive neighbour, who called with her milk. It was only the first attack, and the defence of her knowledge of her husband's affairs kept her pretty well occupied till he came home—owner of Hawksworth Hall, the great Hawksworth iron foundries, and the five thousand a-year they brought in. He had been received as master in the splendid house old Job Saunders had built to shelter his infirmities, his failing health and self-imposed loneliness. Geoffrey had gone upstairs to the darkened room, and gazed in reverence, not unmixed with curiosity, on the worn old face and shrunken form of his unknown uncle. Later on he had followed him to the great new vault in Hawksworth churchyard; then, in the gorgeously decorated apartment they called the library, had heard the old man's brief Will read. House and land, furniture, plate, horses and carriages, all were absolutely his; everything, even to the dismissing and rewarding of the servants, left to his discretion.

The old lawyer congratulated him warmly.

"Your late uncle, Mr. Saunders, had great confidence in you. He knew you well by report, though it was one of his odd fancies never to see you or make your personal acquaintance. A very odd man was Mr. Job Saunders."

Geoffrey assented. He had heard say so. And since so much had been left to him, he should be glad of Mr. Pritchard's advice with regard to matters—when he returned, that was.

"You intend, then, to keep on the iron works, Mr. Saunders?" said the lawyer. And Geoffrey answered "Yes," and after completing his arrangements for the time, went home.

He had not written to his wife the news of his good fortune; thinking it better to wait until they met. She received it from him with less pleasure than he had expected, asking, with a kind of wistful

excitement: "Is the place so very grand, Geoffrey? I shall not like to live in a great house like that, and be a fine lady."

Geoffrey laughed at her a little, telling her he would not have her a fine lady for the world, and wishing in his heart that his pretty wife were not quite so childish. For his own part, he had no doubts as to his new position. He was probably a better educated man than his uncle had ever been, upright and fearless in character, and with a readiness to profit by the opportunities which had at last come to him. He would conquer all the difficulties which lay before him, and fit himself for taking his place in the county among the men whose interests were similar to his own. Ambition and duty no longer pointed different ways, and with a clear conscience he could now take the good life offered him.

The "silvery April showers" were falling when Geoffrey Saunders and his wife left the little cottage at Saintbury behind them to go and take up their abode at Hawksworth Hall; and it was with something very much akin to distress that Lily first saw her new home as the carriage which had met them at the station wound slowly up the road. A high square block of building, all red brick and white stone, on a shoulder of the low hill where the two black, smoking foundry chimneys stood like gigantic sentinels. The afternoon sun was gleaming on the many windows, and over the terraced gardens laid out with formal flower-borders and squares of turf, with a due allowance of vases on high pedestals, and plaster Venuses and Cupids. The house itself was decorated and furnished with a lavish degree of magnificence. Everywhere were brilliant carpets and curtains, huge mirrors, and costly if not valuable pictures and statuary.

The heavy grandeur of the whole place was by no means welcome to Lily, who could find in it nothing homelike or familiar. Wearied and excited with her journey, she had some trouble to maintain her composure before the maid who conducted her to her room, and forthwith proceeded to unpack her boxes. She had had time to provide herself with a wardrobe befitting her new position; and the sight of her own fair face and figure when she was at last dressed for dinner gave her courage to descend to the cold splendours of her drawing-room. There she found her husband watching from the open window the light of his foundry fires. Geoffrey's grave self-possession helped her through the prolonged trial of dinner, though she scarcely dared to raise her eyes lest she should see her own wistful, troubled face in the shimmering plate glass of the sideboard opposite; and she cried a little afterwards in the drawing-room over the very magnificence of her new abode.

The days that followed were altogether as strange and dreary. Geoffrey was away from morning till night, closeted with Goff and Pritchard at Hawksworth; or in the foundry, learning with characteristic determination and thoroughness every detail of the business of which he was now master. And Lily, left alone, wandered about the

gorgeous rooms disconsolately, longing for her old occupations and amusements, and not knowing how to provide herself with fresh interests. She was not one to adapt herself readily to so complete a change of circumstances. Her mental resources were not great, neither was her physical energy, and the novelty of her surroundings was rather painful than pleasant. There were no domestic duties to perform, and she had soon exhausted her only two occupations of books and needlework, for there seemed no homelike corner in all that great house where she could gather together her possessions and sit down to read or sew. Geoffrey had no time to drive out with her, and there were no neighbours to visit. Old Job Saunders had been an unpopular man among the iron-masters, and their wives and daughters were in no haste to make the acquaintance of his successors. The few who called upon Lily were effectually prevented by her shyness from making friends with her, whilst the rector, a shy, scholarly old bachelor, invariably made the visits he felt obliged to pay as brief as possible.

Saintbury was too far away to admit of Lily's going home or seeing anything of her own people. Geoffrey had at first offered her father a place at the foundry for himself or either of his sons, with a handsome salary. But the proposal did not suit John Thorne's ideas of independence, and though friendly enough with his son-in-law, he steadily refused to have anything to do with his good fortune.

Before many months had passed, Geoffrey was gaining slowly but surely the respect and esteem of his own workpeople, and also of the iron-masters and employers of labour in the district. His natural ability and force of character fully made up for the deficiencies in his education. In his speech and manner there had always been a degree of refinement at least as great as that which prevailed in the society in which he found himself. He had ever thought and acted like a gentleman; he dressed and spoke as one now. But Lily, in her isolation, had no opportunity of acquiring a knowledge of the world, or even of Hawksworth etiquette. She possessed a certain natural grace, and clad in her long black dresses, whose sombre colour made her fair skin seem more dazzlingly fair, her golden hair piled upon the top of her small head in the latest fashion, she looked as sweet and lovely a vision as a man need desire to see. If, however, she was aware of her own charms, the knowledge was not sufficient to give her confidence, and she had not the strength of will resolutely to take up the burden of her changed mode of life. Had Geoffrey been able to devote his time to her, most of her feelings of strangeness and all her unhappiness would have been spared; but left to their solitary indulgences, she became daily more depressed and languid. "I have nothing to do here and no friends; I am not good enough or clever enough for Geoffrey," was her constant thought; but it was unuttered, and her husband knew nothing of her inexpressible loneliness.

The months advanced, and the summer sun blazed down on the

broad shadeless terraces and lawns hour after hour. Lilly would spend most of her time in the shrubberies beyond, where she was not more solitary than in her suite of rooms, which were far removed from the part of the house where the servants performed or neglected their duties as they felt disposed. Under the shadow of a group of Scotch firs and larches, she would sit in her low wicker chair, the simplest she now possessed, her hands folded over the little old work-box she had kept as a relic of Saintbury, and her soft wistful eyes fixed on the blue line of haze, where from a hundred tall chimneys the smoke of Lidford ascended. There, at least, was nothing grand or brilliant, nothing to oppress her with a sense of her unfitness for her position.

Leading this kind of life week after week, what wonder that her step grew slow, her face white and thin? She tried to appear cheerful when in Geoffrey's presence, but he was often away in London or Lidford; and so little did he know of her troubles and lonely heart-ache, that he was both surprised and displeased when she asked one morning if she might not go home to Saintbury.

They were sitting at breakfast at one end of the long dining-room; Lily, clad in a simple white dress, an exquisitely fair and fragile figure, amid the gorgeous appointments of the room and breakfast-table. Geoffrey looked up from his letters.

"You want to go back to Saintbury? It is too far for you to travel now, Lily. You had better write and ask your mother to come and stay with you instead."

"That would be of no use; she could not leave the children," said Lily, wistfully. "And I could go, Geoffrey. I should like to be with mother again. I don't like this place; it's too grand and lonely; I can't feel at home here. Perhaps if I were to go and stay at Saintbury for a month or two, I should not mind it so much when I came back."

"You cannot do that, Lily," answered Geoffrey. "I'm sorry you're dull, and I will try and not leave you so much alone, but I can't let you go away now."

"I should so like to live at Saintbury again," pleaded Lily.

"We can't, dear; it is impossible. I must live here, and you will get used to the place in time. You must have your sisters to stay with you," added Geoffrey, more gently.

"I shall never be used to it. Oh, Geoffrey, do let me go back to mother. I shall never be happy here."

Lily's voice died away in a sob, and Geoffrey looked at her a little alarmed.

"My dear Lily, what makes you say such things? Of course I can't let you go home to live with your mother again. Do be reasonable," he answered, rather sternly, coming round as he spoke to lean over her chair and take both the little hands, that covered her face, in his own. And when the tears had been forced back, and a faint smile rewarded him, he kissed her and returned to his seat.

"I'm sorry to have to leave you to-day, Lily, but I have to go out

on important business. Perhaps I shall not be home till to-morrow night. Do you mind much?"

"No," said Lily, rather faintly.

"You must get something to do, and then you will not feel so lonely. You used to be fond of flowers—why not amuse yourself in the conservatory, and make the gardener cut you some for the house? You could arrange them far better than the servants."

Poor Lily! She was in no mood to encounter so solemn and imposing a functionary as the gardener. However, she smiled dutifully and answered that she would go and look at the flowers, and Geoffrey gathered up his letters and went off, bidding her farewell rather hurriedly to escape any questions as to his destination. For he wished to avoid telling her that he was going to Saintbury, and had privately resolved to see her mother and bring her back with him.

It was not more than three hours by rail, and when he arrived there at midday he went at once to the Thornes' house. But much to his vexation, Mrs. Thorne had gone out, and was not expected home for a week. Leaving a message, he went up to the stone yard to see his old master, and arrange with him respecting the sale of his cottage and garden. Old Jonathan had much to say, and much caustic advice to offer, and it was late in the evening before Geoffrey left the house, and, crossing the yard, stood once more under the shadow of the church tower, beside his brother's grave.

The vague sense of uneasiness and regret which had been pursuing him all day brought with it, now that he had time to reflect, some traces that were visible in his dark face and keen bright eyes. He had been again a little neglectful of his young wife's happiness and comfort, a little too much absorbed in his new interests. He had left her too much alone, and been careless of those little attentions and caresses of which women thought so much. He must in future try to make her completely happy, for the sake of his promise, still, his conscience told him, unfulfilled.

But what if it had been all a fatal mistake, and he never could fulfil it? The thought came again and again like some dark presage of evil; but it was a reflection too painful to be endured at that time and place, and he straightened his tall figure, and turned away quickly.

Someone coming across the yard in the dusk met him at the church gates. It was a porter from the station, and Geoffrey took the long orange-coloured envelope he held out, without a word. "A shillin' to pay, sir," said the man. It was handed to him, and, turning away a little from his curious gaze, Geoffrey opened the message. It was from the doctor at Hawksworth; a briefly-worded one.

"Your wife is ill. Come home at once. Will send to station to meet the next two trains."

Ten minutes later the northern express was thundering out of the station, and Geoffrey leaning back in the corner of his

carriage with folded arms and closed eyes, was having the first bitterness of a repentance that comes too late. His was a journey that is daily taken. Oh, who does not know that rush to the station, those long hours of helpless inaction while you were going steadily homewards? Then those five miles of wet, muddy lanes! Continents and oceans might as well have lain between you; for though the mare stepped out gallantly, the toll bar was open, and you had not even to pull up at the lodge gates, when you reached the old house the blinds were drawn down close, there were weeping servants in the hall, and for you no unclouded sunshine through the rest of life's journey.

Geoffrey found the carriage waiting for him at the station, and with a hurried question to his groom he took the reins. "His mistress was a little better; the doctor had left the Hall; he was coming back again later on," the man said.

His master scarcely answered, and pulling up in the avenue, flung the reins to him, desiring him to drive round to the stables quietly. Then he strode across the lawn to the house. The door was unlocked and a light burning in the hall, but the house was silent and deserted. Geoffrey ran up the stairs and along the corridor rapidly.

The door of his wife's dressing-room was half open, and someone said "Come in" in answer to his knock. A couple of frightened maid-servants sat whispering together over the fire in the half-darkened room.

"Where is your mistress?" he enquired in a low, stern voice. One of the girls rose to answer in a shrill whisper.

"In the next room, sir. She was asleep when the doctor left, and he said she was on no account to be disturbed."

"And the housekeeper—where is she?"

"Ill in bed, too, sir. The doctor is to bring a nurse back with him from Lidford."

The door between the two rooms was not closed, and Geoffrey went towards it. A lamp was burning dimly on the toilet-table and a little fire in the grate cast a ruddy glow over the carpet and on the blue curtains and white coverlid of the bed. But no pale, sweet face rested on the pillow underneath the gorgeous canopy. The bed was empty, and the window—outside which was a balcony with a flight of stone steps leading to the terrace—stood open. Geoffrey stepped back.

"Good heavens, girl," he cried, "your mistress has left her room. Get a light instantly and search the house."

The women's scared faces terrified him more than the deserted chamber, and without waiting to see his order obeyed he returned to the window.

There, on the balcony was the low wicker chair, and on it a work-box. A tiny lace-edged handkerchief lay on the second step of the staircase. Geoffrey picked it up and went down with a few rapid

strides to the terrace below. The August night had grown chilly with the heavy dew that was falling, and the lawn was wet and glistening. The great plaster statues gleamed out white and cold in the light of the waning harvest moon, and flung heavy shadows across the turf and on the gravel walk down which Geoffrey hurried. The wind was still. The whole place seemed like some deserted wilderness as he made his way to the shrubbery, with a terrible fear at his heart.

Beyond Lily's favourite clump of firs was a long narrow pool of clear dark water, set like a mirror between the perfectly straight grassy banks which rose a little above it to the narrow path under the trees; bordering the path was a thick arbutus hedge. Beyond the garden wall above, rose the low hill on which glowed, like two huge red eyes, the lights of the master's foundry fires. Geoffrey stopped short with a muttered exclamation; they seemed to come upon his search like a hideous vision. He called again: "Lily, Lily, where are you? Answer me, my darling."

His voice rang out hoarsely in the silence, and there was a quiver in the trees of startled birds, and a faint echo from the hill, and something white gleamed in the darkness of the narrow path.

Geoffrey stood still, and his wife came towards him slowly. The soft white dressing-gown she wore she had gathered up on one side; on the other it swept the damp mossy ground, on which her little high-heeled slippers made no sound. Her hands were clasped loosely over her head, her wistful eyes were fixed dreamily on some infinite distance, a soft flush was on her face.

Geoffrey drew a deep breath. "Great heavens!" he muttered. "What has happened to her? Lily, Lily, my love!"

She paused a moment with what seemed a painful effort to recall some lost memory; then moved on again, speaking to herself in a low, troubled tone. "I want to go home to Saintbury, and he says I must stay here. Geoffrey, will you not let me go home, for one little day?"

He waited for her quietly, fearing to speak again until he held her in his arms. She did not start or shriek, and her soft eyes met his without a gleam of recognition in their wistful, pleading gaze. "You know he will not let me go home, and I am so unhappy here," she repeated, sadly.

"My darling, I will take you home, but come away from this place."

The bitterness of his repentance had already taught Geoffrey Saunders a new language, and a sudden fire flashed into Lily's eyes. "No, no, you mustn't talk to me like that, now I am to be his wife," she said, drawing away her hands; and, clasping them again over the golden coil of her hair, she moved on. Geoffrey followed, silent and sick at heart, his arm held out round the little waist he dare not touch.

Slowly, but without hesitation, she went towards the house over the wet, dewy lawns and along the broad terrace walks, pausing at last under the light of her chamber window. The flush died out of

Lily's face, and she shivered slightly. The next moment Geoffrey had his wife in his arms, and was striding up the steps to the balcony, and in a moment more had laid her down under the gorgeous blue and golden canopy, whose grandeur had nightly weighed upon her simple, innocent heart.

"What has happened?" demanded the doctor's calm, guarded voice at his elbow.

"She has been delirious; I found her wandering in the garden," he answered, briefly.

"Ah, I see. Now, will you just go downstairs, Mr. Saunders, and get something to eat. I dare say you have not dined. No immediate cause for alarm, I assure you, and I will call you if you are wanted."

The doctor drew him to the door with a little authoritative gesture, and then Geoffrey went downstairs into the deserted dining-room and sat down amidst all the cold splendour and brilliance in utter desolation. There was no book, no work, no trifle of hers in all that wide lofty room; she had passed through it daily and left no sign. Nay, a few hours ago she had sat at the head of that long table half hidden from him by a load of glittering plate and pyramids of flowers. But her presence did not linger there now. It was all cold and bare and splendid; and Geoffrey's thoughts went back to the one small room of his old home, to the sanded floor, the clean hearth and brightly polished furniture. There, Lily's hand had been everywhere at work; the sound of her soft voice had rung all over the house; her sewing lay here, her bonnet and shawl there. The air was full of her sweet presence each day and he had taken no heed, fool that he was. And now in their great and splendid house it had been lost to him; ay, and was lost for ever. Ambition, the claims of his new position, the fascination of success had so blinded him, he had not even known that his wife was unhappy.

He saw it all now. Lily had loved him, and what had he given in return for that love? For the first time Geoffrey realised how little it had been; how poor a thing was his respect, his admiration, even his tenderness. He had fatally deceived himself in thinking he could satisfy a woman's heart with love given for another's sake, and he had broken that gentle heart with his indifference and neglect. Better, far better he had never sought to fulfil his promise than this.

How long Geoffrey sat there he did not know, but the pale grey dawn was creeping in through the closed shutters and heavy velvet curtains when the doctor entered, and coming up to him laid a hand on his shoulder.

"You had better come upstairs now, Mr. Saunders," he said.

"Is she better?" questioned Geoffrey, hoarsely.

"She is conscious; but you must be calm and say nothing to excite or trouble her, please."

The young man turned his haggard face into the light with an eager, questioning look and was answered as silently, and then he

followed his companion up stairs. Nurse and doctor went away into the next room and left Geoffrey kneeling beside his wife and gazing into her soft eyes in passionate grief and self reproach.

"Lily—my love!" he said, gently.

She turned to him smiling.

"Geoffrey, I didn't know you were at home. When did you come? And did you call me?"

"You were in the garden, sweetheart, and I called you because I couldn't find you."

"Oh, I remember. I wanted to go home, and I tried to find the way, though you said I wasn't to go. It was wrong. Will you forgive me, Geoffrey, for wanting to leave you?"

"Darling, it is I who must be forgiven: I left you."

"Yes, but you've come back again and I don't want to go now. I'll stay ——"

It availed nothing now that Geoffrey Saunders held his sweet wife in his arms and kissed her white lips passionately. She smiled now and again, meeting his eyes as he knelt there still, while the sunlight flushing in through the crimson curtain fell on the bed. Lily opened her eyes wearily, in the bright warm light that had gathered round her. "I will stay now," she repeated again—and so left him for ever.

"SO BEST."

"So best!" why would ye seek to call
The dead one back again?
She was so weary of the strife;
Why would ye seek to lengthen out the life
That was so full of pain?

Why will ye not, oh, doubting hearts! believe
That what is done is best?
Do ye not know that Death brings peace
To the world-worn, aching heart—a sure release
To those who fain would rest?

She knew enough of that which we call Life,
With all its weight of woe
Its sad to-day, its drear to-morrow;
She knew its dumb despair, its sin and sorrow;
And she was glad to go.

Call her not back—disturb her not
In her eternal rest.
Though nevermore from out the skies
The light of earth shall shine in the tired eyes
For ever closed—"So best."

INA L. F.

AMONG THE WELSH.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "The Cruise of the Reserve Squadron," &c.

Pistyll-y-Cain.

PORTMADOC, with its crowd of shipping, was left behind. The train steamed on, fast and furious, as if it too longed to pass as quickly as possible from the disquieting influence. In the neighbourhood of such scenery, the very existence of the little town seemed an intrusion. Amongst loveliest hills and valleys and plains, wooded heights and running streams, abounding here in absolute perfection, what business had coal and iron and slate, with all their black and prosy consequences, to find a local habitation? And yet, in a way, there was something striking and interesting in the very violence of the contrast—if one only chose to see it.

But away went the train, once more amid green pastures and running waters. The bay on the right reflected the light from the sky, grey and subdued, this morning, without any warmth or sunshine. Ahead of us were the Barmouth Mountains, their great beauty not to be seen from this distance. The railway rounded a sharp curve, and presently we passed the most beautiful and conspicuous object on the road—Harlech Castle. The train stopped for a moment at the station, then passed quickly onwards, only giving time for a few moments' gaze at its grim old walls perched upon their commanding height

and overlooking a wide tract of historical country: great plains and wooded hills and slopes, the expanse of Cardigan Bay, opening out to the dignity of a sea, and the long chain of hills stretching far away to the right.

We had not looked upon those old grey walls of Harlech for nearly ten years, and the very sight of the castle, which from the first had made a strong impression upon us, brought back all that serious gap in a lifetime—one seventh of man's full measure. As in a vision, uprose the years that were gone, with all their light and shade, all the weight and woe of their errand; the infinite sadness and solemnity of that we call life; the unseen, unknown blight which falls upon our dearest hopes; the infinite aspirations, the lofty ambitions, the great things intended, the little accomplished. These returnings and revisitings after long intervals are terrible experiences; positive events and milestones in life's highway; and the spirit closes its wings, and hides its face, and withdraws into the silence and agony of groanings which cannot be uttered. Vanitas vanitatum. It is man's universal motto.

Away went the train, Harlech passed out of sight, before long we had reached Barmouth. On the platform were faces waiting with greetings; one a home face, but all well-known and loved; all welcome as flowers in Spring, as sun in harvest, all as refreshing as water to a parched soul, after one's late solitary wanderings among the Welsh. It was a happy chance, which had assembled them all together in this little far-away Welsh town; a happy thought which had inspired one to work round to this culminating point, and terminate one's wanderings for the time being with pleasant recollections: pass with one plunge from depressing solitude to the delights of friendship and gaiety.

There stood E., who with a sister's anxiety had so recently, before leaving home, written warning letters about Snowdon, at the instigation of one yet nearer and dearer: the mother, whom each and all possess but once in their lives; best and truest of earthly friends; never fully appreciated, never replaced; occupying a spot in each heart sacred from all other intrusion. Close to E. was my friend and hostess for all the time I should remain in Barmouth, who, with calm face and earnest, kindly eyes, was the centre of a small group, equally her friends and guests. Amongst them stood Sir Ben, fun and humour of the party, whose lively sallies were a constant source of laughter, and whose unswerving devotion to dear Miss F., whenever they meet, has passed into a proverb, and is something beautiful in the annals of respectful admiration.

We left the bustle of the platform, and were soon under the shadow of Minfor house. In the doorway, ready with a hearty Welsh welcome and Welsh curtsey, was our good landlady of ten years ago, Mrs. Evans, on whom ten years had passed in a kindly manner. At that time, she and her husband, John Evans, had only one house in

Barmouth—Glan-y-Mor ; but the world has gone well with them—as it should do with all good and honest people—and now they have two houses, side by side, overlooking the charming waters of the estuary, and the lovely hills on the opposite shore. If ever honesty and kindliness were written upon two faces, they shine forth in glowing letters upon those of John Evans and his wife ; and happy they who, visiting Barmouth, find shelter within the quiet and comfortable walls of Minfor House.

" I hope you will come to us without fail," my hostess had written days ago. " You know where we are, and how well placed at Minfor House. It is only Mrs. Evans's comfortable house and good care that brings us to Barmouth. We are more at home here than in any other place we visit. Your prophet's chamber awaits you, I am sorry to say *in the roof*. But E. insisted that you would like it best, because of its exquisite view."

E. was quite right. It was a privilege to possess a window with such a view as this. All views gain with height, and even a few feet make a distinct difference to the brightness and purity of the air.

For many reasons I was glad to see Barmouth again. It had changed in ten years, yet changed little : far less than most places alter in that space of time. Ten years will expand a hamlet to a village, a village to a town, with a mayor and body corporate. But in Barmouth it had added only a few houses : here a terrace overlooking the sea, standing almost on the very shore, and there a solitary building perched on a height by some enterprising lover of nature, and commanding all the exquisite surrounding country.

Perhaps Barmouth cannot and never will change very much, for it hardly possesses the necessary capacities for it. It is built on the mountain side, and cannot expand. Any additions that are made must be made beyond the town. Barmouth may increase in length, but scarcely in bulk. Perhaps this is as well—better certainly for the picturesqueness of the town. In itself it looks as primitive as it did ten years ago. The one long, straggling street showed no difference, except that one or two shops had enlarged and aspired to plate glass windows. There was still the same old crier, with his wonderful cracked old bell, giving forth announcements in Welsh, which he was good enough to interpret into English for the benefit of the ignorant ; a very profound ignorance on our part. The language may be as musical as it is said to be, but the assertion is one to be taken in faith.

But the chapel that used to startle one by its performances was no longer visible. Houses had sprung up around it—for I believe it is still there, though—like the modest violet—it has retired into the shade. The comparison, perhaps, is better than it seems, for the chapel flourished in the very *odour* of sanctity. Service in Welsh was held on the ground floor, and in English on the first floor ; both frequently, I believe, at the same hour. And it came to pass that

the rival congregations would occasionally sing hymns at the same moment to different tunes. What an opportunity was there for proving the musical capacities of the Welsh language, for if it stood so severe a test triumphantly, it might certainly boast itself more than worthy of its reputation.

And in those days, how well I remember a certain cavalcade that used to parade the streets of Barmouth, to the admiration of the whole town, who, headed by good Mrs. Evans herself, would rush to their doors and gaze and gape until the cortége had passed out of sight and hearing. Angels and ministers of grace defend us! This cortége consisted of a donkey and two paniers, and two chubby-faced urchins of very tender years, and two nurse-maids chattering French and English indifferently, all forming a procession of such sound and importance as might have attended a veritable royal progress. I remember as if it were yesterday, that one little urchin in the paniers had cheeks the colour of a blush rose and eyes that had borrowed their blue from heaven, and with a trumpet heralded his own approach and passage; whilst the other was only just old enough to look out upon a tolerably new world with great brown eyes that gazed at you in perpetual wonder. I remember them so well, possibly because these little visitants to a new world condescended to honour me with an amount of favour that was duly appreciated by one who as a rule was, and is, contented to admire tender childhood at a very respectful distance.

The quadruped that had the honour of carrying this precious freight was certainly the most patient animal that ever lived. It was also sensible and tractable, for if ever it broke into a trot, shrill screams would rise from the paniers, and the astonished duennas after the first moment of petrifaction, would rush forward with a protest, and the docile creature would quickly return to a dignified walk.

All this has passed away with time and change. These are only little pictures that dwell in the memory. But even trifling episodes will for ever associate themselves with certain places, until it is almost impossible to think of the one without conjuring up the other. Years afterwards they will rise up in our very dreams, vividly as though but of yesterday, until our very life appears to mock us with its shortness, and time itself seems annihilated. To-day, that life is green as the grass, to-morrow, cut down, dried up, and withered. Alas, my brother!

To return to the present time.

There are still wonderfully picturesque bits about Barmouth, as of old. Humble cottages perched on the mountain side, with steps leading from one to another, in broken and artistic manner. It seems an endless journey, to climb to some of these old places; but once there, you are well rewarded for any toil by the splendid panorama of hills and water that unfolds itself to the dazzled vision.

For nowhere, I believe, are there such hills as at Barmouth. It is not that they are so lofty—though Cader Idris itself is the centre of a group. It is their number and form. The accumulation of pile upon pile, falling one behind another, in the utmost beauty of shape and undulation. A perfect amphitheatre of hills, casting their reflection into the waters of the bay. There is something specially beautiful and full of repose about these Barmouth hills : a something one scarcely sees elsewhere. Very often their beauty is almost unearthly ; and standing in the middle of the long railway bridge and looking upwards at this magnificent amphitheatre, you can only gaze in absolute silence. Frequently steeped in a wonderful purple haze are these hills, delicate and palpable as the bloom of grapes. And, turning the other way, the sunsets are wonderful in their changing colours, now gilding all nature, the town, the little harbour and the water with a golden glow, and now tinging it all with a warm red flush.

This bridge used to be one of our favourite haunts, especially at high water, when we literally seemed to enjoy a walk upon the sea. It stretches across from one shore to the other, and cannot be much less than half a mile long. The bridge has a walk for foot passengers, but the centre is reserved for trains ; trains that were the terror of some of the ladies of our party, who watched for them as Miss Betsy Trotwood once watched for the donkeys. Perhaps it was hardly to be wondered at. They roll within a foot or so of you, these trains ; the engine hisses and steams ; and if the driver is in a malicious mood, he sets up a shrill whistling as it passes you that would wake the Seven Sleepers, and interferes with your proper hearing for a week to come. The carriages rumble and rush over the bridge with a noise as of thunder, and the bridge itself vibrates in a terrific manner. Then it all recedes ; the train is traced only by the long line of white steam twisting and twining amongst the trees and rich foliage of the hill sides ; the bridge returns to its ordinary repose ; nerves recover their tone.

We had patrolled backwards and forwards one day, upon this bridge for more than an hour, half a dozen of us, when suddenly our hostess's own maid was seen hastening round the point, an ominous yellow envelope upraised in her hand. Everyone was seized with agonies. Everyone felt persuaded that it must be for him or her. And it was singular that each and all had some sick friend or relative at a distance about whom they were more or less anxious. Who was now summoned, and for whom the bad news ? For of course it must be bad news. One's thoughts always fly to the worst on these occasions : one might even add on all occasions. The greater number of us are so constituted that the cloud in the sky no bigger than a man's hand is sufficient to obscure our sunshine. The heart of man is not more deceitful than his imagination.

So everyone at once appropriated the telegram and its ill news to himself, and Sir Ben went so far as to declare that if anything had

happened to dear Miss F., or she had eloped with a gallant of high degree, he would not survive the shock. "There was a parapidge in case of fire," said the renowned Mrs. Gamp to her sister in wickedness; and here was one also in case of need, over which one might plunge into the waters of the estuary, and in the sleep that knows no waking end all one's earthly sorrows.

As for E. and the present writer, their fears flew to one at home, who had been left in delicate health, and with pen laid aside for rest and repose. They said nothing, but their hearts stopped beating for a moment. Sarah now approached, pale as a winding-sheet. "Who is it for?" called out a trembling chorus. "Miss W." came back the answer. And "Miss W." the hills seemed to echo and echo and echo with a sort of undying wail. "Open it," said E., passing it over with a face from which all colour seemed to have fled for ever: "I cannot."

It was opened, and the following message from A. read aloud: "*Many happy returns of the day!* Kind regards all round."

We had all forgotten for the moment that it was E.'s birthday. The reaction was too much for some of us. Sorrow and joy affect people in different ways. Each has his own manner of showing emotion. Some faint, others become hysterical, some are grandly calm, censuring weaker minds with the strength and eloquence of silence. In this instance everyone followed the bent of his or her peculiar temperament, and for a time ceased to be their normal and natural self. But gradually peace of mind was restored, emotions subsided, calm succeeded storm. Nevertheless the equanimity of the morning had been fatally disturbed, and we all left the bridge to solitude, the hills, and the passing trains.

In sending the telegram, A. had been moved, no doubt, by excellent intentions; but the vision of a flying herald, pale, anxious and distraught: our own fears and agonies: these had turned the event into a play of two acts: the first act a tragedy, the second happily ending in comedy.

For many reasons Barmouth is excellent as a place of sojourn. And first and foremost amongst these reasons is the fact that it abounds in drives and excursions which plunge one into a veritable earthly paradise. They are, indeed, of the utmost beauty and interest, and of a different type from the part of North Wales hitherto mentioned in these pages. Many would say there are no beauties in Wales equal to those to be found in the neighbourhood of Barmouth, and they would have strong arguments and testimony in their favour. The endless hills are clothed with a richness of wood and verdure scarcely to be met with elsewhere. There is a depth and beauty and diversity about the valleys that is simply wonderful. The road constantly winds and turns, and is for ever opening up new valleys, or, which comes to the same thing, the same valley from a fresh point of view The interest of a drive never flags for a moment, attention is ever on the alert, wonder and admiration are ever awake.

We started one morning for one of these drives. J. had business with a certain Cornelius Owen, of Glen Eden. Our hostess had fallen in love with the Welsh cows, or rather with the milk they yielded, and J., our friend and host, had decided that some should be sent to their English home. Now Cornelius Owen possessed two virtues: he was an honest man, and he sold good cattle. He was also, as we afterwards found, an amusing and original character.

BIT OF OLD BARMOUTH.

So for Glen Eden we set out: J., Sir Ben, and your humble servant. It was a long drive and would occupy the greater part of the day.

Never, somehow, had the beauty of the drive seemed so striking as it did to-day. The trees were just beginning to put on their autumn tints. Hills were on all sides, Cader Idris, on the right, towering above the group it dignified. The road wound about the hills, now opening out upon a splendid view of valley and height and river, now enshrouded and almost darkened by overhanging trees. Now we looked down a steep precipice covered with tangle and loveliest ferns, through which the river glinted and gleamed, now gazed upon a great pine-covered height, trees reaching upwards to the very summit. Here and there a house nestled in some splendid nook, a perfect Eden within an Eden—for some portion of this valley is so called, after the river which flows through it. It is well named, for it is truly an earthly Eden. But the valley nearest Barmouth is the Valley of the Mawddach; the Eden comes later on.

Mile after mile we went, through such scenery as defies description. Hills opening and closing about us, now seeming on our left and now on our right, richly wooded, beautiful in form and outline. Wild flowers strewed our path to right and left, fresh green

moss and rare ferns. We passed the bridge where the road turns off for Dolgelly, that quaint and sleepy little town buried amongst the hills, wherein Owen Glendowr's house reminds one forcibly of its past history. You may muse and dream over it in the wild beauty of the Torrent Walk, with its rippling waters and miniature cascades. All this we had seen years ago—we were not to see it to-day. We continued on our way and presently passed Tyn-y-Groes, a lovely spot, where, at the Oakley Arms, a retired spot, in sight and sound of the running river, you may find good accommodation by night, whilst your days are given up to fishing and the contemplation of all these wonderful beauties of nature.

BARMOUTH.

So we made way until we reached the appointed goal, where it had been arranged, by previous correspondence, that we should take luncheon. This was at the general shop and post-office kept by Mrs. Hughes Jones in the Ganllwyd Valley, about six miles from Dolgelly. There, in a snug little parlour upstairs, which she is glad to let in Summer (it is just big enough for a modest bachelor), we found a table spread with the whitest of cloths and the freshest of butter and home-made bread: to which was added many good things from a well-stocked hamper brought with us.

Our first duty was to interview Cornelius Owen, and a few moments' walk found us at Glen Eden. He was at his door, in expectant attitude, and primed for the important business on hand. Would that I could do justice to his tones, expression, and peculiar English.

It would be so impossible that it must not even be attempted. A wiry, middle-aged man, turning grey, but hale and strong, and capable of taking his cattle long distances without fatigue. Sir Ben, who knew him well, could follow him easily in his sing-song Welsh tones and curious English. But very much that he said was altogether lost to us who now saw him for the first time. It was to be regretted, for he seemed a man of an original turn of mind, and possessed of a sense of humour, which rang out in his very laughter. And where he uttered only commonplace remarks, the turn of his voice and his manner of expressing them seemed to give to them new life and individuality.

Now for the cattle, and Cornelius led the way to a field at the back of his house. Here the cows had been turned out for inspection; beautiful, meek-eyed creatures, with fine heads and gentle ways. They were young, and, to all appearance, faultless. Cornelius praised them, and there was an honest ring in his voice which was not to be doubted. Besides this, his reputation was great in the neighbourhood, far and near, and Sir Ben had had many a satisfactory transaction with him.

So the bargain was settled, and the kine henceforth were to find a home on English soil. The manner of conveying them was appointed, trains were arranged, and the cows were to be met at a certain station and a certain time, like boys coming home from school. The patient animals looked on whilst these important matters were being discussed, and blinked their large expressive eyes, just as if they understood all that was going on. One of them indeed, blinked and blinked until she dropped a tear, as if she quite understood that she was about to become an exile from her native hills; would tread no more the Eden pastures or crop the sweet short grass that has no little to do with the flavour and richness of the milk the cows yield. Yet if she had known it, there was little to weep for. She was only exchanging Welsh hills for English, and one lovely country for another; her lines henceforth would fall in pleasant places; she was about to lead the life of an indulged and privileged princess. But as yet she knew nothing of all this; and possibly she was a cow that looked on the dark side of life and met troubles half-way: as so many of us do who are not cows; laying burdens upon our own backs which need never have been borne, and never have existed out of our imaginations. This, however, is according to the peculiar temperament given to each of us, though strengthened or otherwise, no doubt, by our experiences of life.

We left the cows putting their heads together, and apparently holding a cabinet council, which seemed to end in nothing; for they went back to their grazing in a resigned sort of way, evidently feeling it their duty to give in to the enemy, and murmuring words which sounded to one's fancy very much like "Too late! Too late!"

Cornelius Owen now proposed to accompany us as guide to Pistyll-y-Cain, a celebrated waterfall in the neighbourhood. So J.

and I accepted his escort, whilst Sir Ben, who knew the fall as well as he knew the alphabet, went his way in search of some of his friends in the neighbourhood.

We started up the narrow glen that was almost a ravine, wild and wooded and tangled, at right angles with the road we had lately travelled. It was almost a pass, leading up into the mountains, and the waters of the Mawddach flowed through the glen, over their rocky and uneven bed. Cornelius was entertaining, but also frequently unintelligible. He talked English quite as fast as we did, if not a little faster, and his command of words never failed, but they were peculiar, both in sound and application. He enlivened the road with some of his adventures, one of which was his experiences, once upon a time, in conveying to their destination a herd of cows that he had sold. As far as one could make out, it took him a month's hard walking, during which time he was unable to procure anything to eat, until he finally arrived at his destination: where his patron, to make up for his woes, placed before him a sumptuous repast, and his troubles were remembered no more.

So gossiping, we reached a deserted gold mine, where the refuse of thrown-up ore lay about in abundance; sheds and machinery had been erected here once upon a time, but to-day all was silent, solitary and abandoned. A few yards beyond this, we came to Pistyll-y-Cain, where also we seemed to have reached the end of the world.

It was certainly the finest and most important waterfall I had seen in Wales, about a hundred feet high, and five feet wide. But its full height could not be seen from our present position, and the fall was altogether difficult to get at.

There was a considerable body of water, which fell into a rocky and eddying basin with a great rush and roar and ascent of spray. Small cavities were hollowed out in the rocks which had become smooth and worn with the action of the water. By dint of hard labour and the risk of a cold bath, we stood at length in full front of the fall, deafened by the roar, unable to hear each other speak. The water eddied and seethed and swirled around like a great whirlpool. Down and down it came, tumbling and tumbling, then rushing onwards, to fall presently into the Mawddach.

Leaving this fall, and going round by the unused and abandoned engine-room, in a few moments we stood before another fall called the Rhaiadr Mawddach. It was not very much like the one we had just left; was more spread and not so lofty, so that the body of water seemed less huge and fell with less thundering noise and force. Perhaps it was the more beautiful fall of the two, and it was certainly more easily seen. Great rocks stretched out at its feet, forming almost a second fall, over which the water rushed and swirled, also on its way to the river Eden.

Here we stayed some moments only. Time was passing, luncheon waited, we had a long drive homewards, and—pleasant thought—friends

anxious for our return. Cornelius Owen was in no hurry, however, and would have lingered and talked till the next morning, if we had not hastened him. As it was, he insisted on hunting amongst the refuse ore for specimens of gold to enrich our collections ; and once again at the end of the valley, would have had us enter his house to see his own specimens of gold, and to taste the wonderful milk of his favourite cow. But human nature has its limits of endurance, and we had reached ours. We bade the worthy fellow farewell, J. commending the cattle to his care and attention, and turned towards Mrs. Hughes Jones's much desired quarters. Sir Ben was at that moment coming down from Aber Eden, which stands so well on the hill-side, overlook-

On the Road to Eden.

ing all this wealth and splendour of wooded heights and rushing water, the meeting of the Eden and the Mawddach. Truly and indeed, one of the grandest views in Wales. It is more than doubtful whether a lovelier valley than this, in its whole extent, is to be found in the Principality, and one feels inclined to indorse the opinion of many that it is before them all.

Ere long we found ourselves once more on the road, returning the way we had come, revelling again in all the wonderful beauties surrounding us on all sides. The day had lost its brightness, and there was an afternoon calmness and repose over all. One landmark after another was passed until at length we approached Barmouth. The waters of the estuary were flowing seawards through the bridge : there was a red flush in the sky and upon the water—the flush of sun-

set. It was unusually brilliant and gorgeous to-night, and some of the rocks reflected a deep, blood-red tinge, that looked almost portentous. The little town looked quaint and quiet as we entered it. Soon came Minfor House, and Mrs. Evans, ready and attentive and anxious for one's comfort as ever, waiting in the doorway.

"The ladies at home, Mrs. Evans?" said Sir Ben. The ladies are always his first thought.

"Yes, Sir Ben," replied Mrs. Evans. "They have just come in and gone upstairs; and indeed they've been very dull without you all day, I'm thinking."

It had been certainly a somewhat depressing day in Barmouth for

VALLEY OF THE EDEN.

anyone at all dependent upon exterior influences. For it was Thanksgiving day for the harvest, and all the shops had been closed, and a Sunday appearance on a week-day somehow always does seem chilling and out of place. They had a curious custom here, too: church and chapel had different Thanksgiving Days, and so the shops had to close on two days, instead of one. But the Welsh, at any rate in Barmouth, are strict in their religious observances, and keep their special days in a commendable manner.

Perhaps good Mrs. Evans was more flattering in her remark than the strict facts of the case demanded, but she had a reserve of gloom to counteract its exhilarating effects.

"You've been sore needed," she said. "We have had no end of telegrams coming for you. I fear it's bad news, Sir Ben."

And it was bad news, though nothing more than he had expected for some time. But it imposed duties upon him which took him away from us the next day.

Thus the first note in the scattering of our pleasant party had sounded. The days crept on and the last one dawned. We were all leaving Barmouth with infinite regret. Melancholy signs of departure met us in every direction and on every landing. Empty rooms; a cargo of boxes and portmanteaux strapped and corded; ladies bonneted and cloaked; maids with an evident sense of their responsibilities, in charge of special treasures which they were prepared to defend on the journey with their lives. Mrs. Evans sad and depressed; ourselves all heartily sorry to leave; all regretting, with the inconsistency of the human heart, that we had not accepted the proposal of our hostess to remain yet another week under the comfortable roof of Minfor House, under the shadow of the Barmouth hills, revelling in all their luxuriance of wood and foliage, where the now rapidly changing tints of autumn were day by day adding fresh beauties to mountains and valleys.

But we had decreed otherwise; the fiat had gone forth; there was no turning back. "I felt sure you would all regret it," said our hostess in her gentle way, with that kindly look in her eyes which was almost a reproach to us. And even as she spoke, the sun burst from behind a cloud, and illumined the room in which we were standing with its glory; casting a flood of gold upon the waters of the estuary, throwing light and life upon the opposite hills: sending Miss S. into raptures, almost into tears of remorse. But it was all of no use, and with a bold plunge we made for the railway station.

The train was at the platform. In compliance with J.'s request, the railway company had sent down a saloon carriage for him, and we started in peace and comfort, if not altogether in happiness. As we passed Minfor House, Mrs. Evans held up what we at first took to be a winding-sheet containing her buried hopes, but which she evidently meant to represent a flag half mast high. We rumbled over the long bridge, and some of our number breathed more freely as the train entered the beautiful windings of the opposite shore. At Dolgelly there was Miss Bessie, with all her wonderful life and spirits and animation, waiting to speed us on our way, and half inclined to join us. The very ring of her voice was pleasant to listen to, a glance at her face enough to drive away melancholy, and we wondered how in the world it happened that she had always been—Miss Bessie. But life is full of mysteries.

Onwards again through the Vale of Llangollen, and all its strange, rare charm. A wide-spreading valley richly wooded, opening out into many chains of hills, into far away luxuriant slopes; rushing, frothy waters, so necessary to all scenery; charming seats which were veritable earthly paradises without—let us hope, within also.

On and on went the train; the moments flew; Wales was passed;

we had done with it and the Welsh for the time being, bidden it a farewell, whether long or short, who could tell? At length came the final separation, and E. and I found ourselves sole occupants of the saloon. The last good-bye had been said. Nearer and nearer we drew to the Capital. Skies grew grey, atmosphere heavy; clouds had gathered. At length we entered London, and found it wrapped in the shades of evening and the unromantic vapours of a yellow fog.

All the late beauties of Wales in which we had rejoiced fell from us. The crowded streets, the glaring lights, after our late quiet experiences, seemed a veritable Pandemonium. We drew down the blinds to keep out the sight, and fell back upon our recollections. But after all, there is a time for all things and all things pass away. Like the old ferryman at Carnarvon, it behoves us to be philosophers, and the greatest philosophy is to do your best and take things as they come. "Our little life is rounded with a sleep." We have our seven ages to play out, those of us who are permitted to reach the allotted span, but I think the final ones may be made less sad and melancholy spectacles than Shakespeare would have them. Yet joy or sorrow, cloud or sunshine, hopes fulfilled or disappointments borne, summer breezes or winter blasts—are they all or any of great moment? For

> This life is but the portal whence we pass
> From Sorrow's kingdom to the light eternal.
> As letters traced on last night's shifting sands
> Are blotted and effaced by the advancing tide,
> So as a winter's tale our lives are told,
> And pass from out their sphere to realms unknown.
> And as the sands upon the shore remain,
> Though last night's characters have disappeared,
> So, gathered to the far unseen, our souls
> Live once again where chance is never found,
> And measurement of time is not, nor any change.
> There in the many mansions of the skies,
> Filling all space with harmonies of song,
> Sons of the Lord Omnipotent by right divine
> We move, more favour'd than the angelic host:
> Such youth immortal and such bliss our own
> As never eye hath seen nor ear hath heard,
> Nor heart of man in loftiest mood conceived.

Yes, all things here fade with time. This is the great burden of life. We are all drifting; ties are sundered; Melancholy marks us for her own. It cannot be otherwise. But though drifting, we can all so manage our winds and tides as to reach a sure Haven at last; that much is given into our own keeping. And once within that haven we enter where death can cast no shadow, and sighing and sorrow have fled away. Happy they who so run as to obtain, and fight, not beating the air!

UNLUCKY THIRTEEN.

I AM a jealous man. There is no use in attempting to deny it; but to-night there will be, there can be, no one of whom I need be jealous. Lord MacPhoole certainly—but——

Here Jenkyns throws open the drawing-room door and announces me: "Mr. Trevor."

"Oh, Trevor, how d'ye do?" says my host, laying his hand on my shoulder.

I shrink inwardly from his touch, but I smile politely; for though I hate the old man, I love his daughter.

"I believe we shall be thirteen," he goes on. "Kent has failed us at the last moment. But you don't mind, do you?"

I protest I have not the slightest objection.

"No, I thought not," says Mr. Bellairs, with a horrid smile—in anyone else but his daughter's father, a disgusting leer. "Superstition is the last thing you young men go in for nowadays, eh?"

I assent to this original proposition.

"Somebody was saying, just before you came in, that Trevor fought shy of thirteen at dinner. But you say you don't?"

From my old nurse I imbibed many curious superstitious horrors, of which I have never been able to rid myself, but how can I confess it to this ogre? I boldly deny any such weakness, and, to my unutterable relief, he moves away.

It is a marvel to me how such a monster can have such a daughter as Evelyn. I think to myself her mother must have been an angel of beauty and goodness, and probably died of horror at a nearer acquaintance with the ogre. I am just settling this question entirely to my own satisfaction, when the door opens. Though my back is turned, I know it is Evelyn. She nods, and smiles kindly as she passes me.

For the space of that second I breathe the air of Paradise. But she goes on into the other drawing-room, and I hear her greeting her guests, and laughing and talking gaily. Then I see Lord MacPhoole, that fatuous idiot, sitting by her, and she seems positively to enjoy his weak jokes. He is a horrid Radical, and to me they have a low, democratic flavour. What right has he to think he may amuse a goddess with his feeble wit? From my inmost soul I loathe the facetious fellow.

To add to my discomfort, those foolish old-world superstitions rear their heads. Never in my life have I made one of thirteen. Of course there is nothing in it, I tell myself. How could there be? Nevertheless I grow more ill at ease. How do I know it is not true? Who has ever proved it? And Evelyn says something

which makes MacPhoole laugh. How can she condescend to be amused with such an empty creature?

Ah, joy! he is leaving her side with some last joke, most likely as stale and old as the hills. The chair next her is empty. Why should not I——?

Thinking to leap at once to Heaven from the place of torment, I rush into the other room.

"Mr. Trevor!" cries a voice I have heard called sweet. To me it is the voice of an owl, a crow.

Taking not the slightest notice, I continue my way, headlong. She sees me coming. Is it only flattering self-deception, or does she smile with pleasure? At this moment I feel some little impediment in my mad career.

"Oh, dear, Mr. Trevor," I hear Miss Fortescue cry, "you have knocked down my fan. Are you growing blind?"

Muttering anathemas on that hateful fan, I pick it up and return it to her. She then proceeds, so it seems to my excited imagination, to inquire minutely into the health of every member of my family. I have always thought myself a squire of dames, and Miss Fortescue is both beautiful and charming; but nevertheless I feel that I could, with cheerful alacrity, apply the first torch to her funeral pyre.

At last she is satisfied. I turn to leave her, and behold that giggling MacPhoole in the act of sitting down again by Evelyn! She only sent him for a fire-screen. Who but I, her bond-slave, should wait on her? Who else fetch her fire-screens?

Freely, unreservedly do I consign Miss Fortescue to outer darkness, there to wander with her fan for ever.

Unconscious of the horrible fate awaiting her, I hear her entertaining Lambert Kerr with accounts of a dance to which she went last night. I sit desperately down by a small table and open an album. On the first page I behold the monster and Miss Fortescue. Bang! I shut it and clasp it.

"Cheer up, Jack, old fellow!" a kind, merry voice says, close to my ear. "You are to sit next but one to her at dinner. I have been pumping Jenkyns."

"Chalmers, you are a trump!" I say gratefully, as he sits down.

"You seem awfully down," he continues, leaning his elbow on the table. "Is it that ass MacPhoole you are jealous of? Only a minute before you came in I heard her compare his laughter to the crackling of thorns under a pot."

"Well," I allow, greatly relieved, "I hardly supposed she would like him, but—hang it all, Chalmers, we are to be thirteen!"

"And what of that?" He stares at me, and then bursts into an incredulous laugh. "You don't mean to say you are growing superstitious, Jack? Poor fellow!"

There is a note of contemptuous pity in his tone, and really my fancies do seem absurd in a sane man.

"N-no," I say, "but still you know, one does not exactly like to run counter to established beliefs."

"Established beliefs!" he laughs again. "I have never had much sympathy with the tender passion myself, but if it can turn a reasonable man like you into an old woman I shall abjure it altogether. I live by my wits, and I can't afford to trifle with them!"

"Chalmers!" I say, angrily; "you are a cold-blooded ——"

"And, I think, Trevor," he returns, pointedly, "you are a trifle too hot-blooded!"

He goes away. The next minute I hear him laughing with Miss Fortescue and Lambert Kerr—at me, I daresay.

But I do not care. In the other drawing-room I see Evelyn still talking to MacPhoole. She is there; here am I, not thirty feet away, yet an impassable gulf divides us. It is like a horrid nightmare.

Then I see MacPhoole leave her, and Chalmers, mine own familiar friend, darts from some lurking-place and, with a fiendish smile of triumph in my direction, takes his empty chair. Of course it may be my fevered fancy, but at this moment his face appears to me more diabolical than ever man's was before. I think of Miles Standish, and curse the hour when I admitted my friend to share the secrets of my bosom. Is he telling her of my egregious folly? She laughs. Is he witty at my expense then? A few hours ago my greatest chum, and now I hate him with a deadly hatred—at least I think I do.

Hurriedly I run over in my mind my ancestors and my relations, as far as I can remember them, but I do not recollect ever to have heard of any one of them as being insane.

Evelyn is still monopolised by Chalmers. In despair I return to the album. This time the fates are more propitious. Opening in the middle of the book I light on the portrait of Evelyn Bellairs. This sweet mouth is not laughing at any other man's wit. These eyes only look straight into my own.

How long I have been gazing at it I do not know, when I hear the sweetest voice in the world say, over my shoulder,

"You are very interested in my album, Mr. Trevor. What are you looking at?"

I spring to my feet, and she moves nearer to the table.

Chalmers has brought her. How I wronged him! With the kindest, pitying smile he meets my eye, and turns away.

"At my own portrait!" she exclaims, looking up to me with a smile.

"Do you think," I say in a low voice, "that I should care to look at any other?"

She blushes and looks down. "How can I tell?" she murmurs.

I am about to utter I know not what, when the voice of the monster is heard through the room, that is to say, he stands about four feet away, and speaks, very likely, in his ordinary voice, but to me it is a hideous shriek.

"' Evelyn," he says, " Lady Burliston wants to hear about Fidèle."

With one glance from her blue eyes she goes.

Can she really prefer comparing notes about those wretched little dogs to talking to me? Yet she seems to be very happy with the ancient Lady Burliston. To my thinking " everything in its place " is a very good old saying, and Lady Burliston should have stayed at home in her arm-chair.

But if I cannot talk to Evelyn I can look at her. Once her eyes meet mine, and then someone comes in front of her and talks to her. Flesh and blood and broadcloth are, alas, impenetrable.

Here Jenkyns announces dinner, and the ogre suddenly appears before me, saying, " Trevor, will you take Miss Fortescue as well as Mrs. Latimer? Kent was to have taken her in."

Mrs. Latimer is my pet abomination, and the ogre's voice distinctly chuckles as he announces this disagreeable fact. With feelings of angry repugnance I move across the room to the simpering unconscious Mrs. Latimer, a prattling baby of thirty. I take her and Miss Fortescue to the dining-room, and, bearing in mind Chalmers' kind prompting, I steer straight to the end of the table. We are just standing in our places, when Miss Fortescue says,

" But surely we are wrong, Mr. Trevor? I am not Lord MacPhoole, and "—looking at my card—" your card is wrong too."

Then Chalmers was deceiving me, and I am not to sit near her after all! Horror! to be made a fool of in this way. The drops stand on my brow; I look savagely round for the traitor, when it suddenly strikes me we are on the right hand side of the table.

Inspired with fresh hope, I say, " I know that we are to sit at this end; suppose we try the other side? "

And, true enough, there we find our names.

I see, with a fearful joy, that Jenkyns has put my name at the top, and left Mrs. Latimer and Miss Fortescue to sit together. Calling down blessings innumerable on his powdered head I take advantage of this arrangement. Thank heaven I gave him a sovereign the other night, although I owed it my tailor many times over.

We are only just in time, for here Lord MacPhoole, whispering another of his odious jokes as he comes, brings in Evelyn. She gives me a little glance, I fondly hope of pleased surprise, as she sees me next to her.

We are standing, waiting for grace, when that vile monster says from the other end of the table, " Mr. Trevor, we cannot allow two ladies to sit together. Will you divide them, please? "

Imploringly do I gaze into that stern monster's eyes, weakly do I half reach out my hand towards my name card as a feeble protest in self-defence, but I finally succumb to his inexorable eye, and—Miss Fortescue finds herself next to my goddess.

The Dean rushes through grace, but he gives me time to pour my disappointment into Evelyn's eyes, and I almost think she is sorry too

On the strength of this my drooping spirits revive, and I awake to hear Mrs. Latimer asking for the salt I pass it hastily, and she seizes the occasion of my head's being turned towards her to say :

"I suppose you have heard the latest news?"

"No," I say, indifferently ; "social? political?"

"I mean Miss Bellairs' engagement."

"She is *not* engaged!" I cry, not so much contradicting her, as daring her to contradict me.

The man opposite to me stares, recalling me to my senses, and Mrs. Latimer goes on in her most aggravatingly babyish manner, "Oh, yes, haven't you heard?—to Lord MacPhoole. Isn't it a rather good match?"

There is no speech, scarcely any breath, left to me. Not the slightest answer do I vouchsafe to her, but I turn at once and begin a strict watch. This, then, is the secret of his staying always by her side. The fiend Jealousy is rampant. Never have I hated a man as I hate MacPhoole.

But I will see for myself. Every look, every expression of hers will I mark. *Can* she love him, a wind-bag, a red-haired Radical Scotchman? But no, I comfort myself, after a careful study of his hateful face, that would be impossible.

Suppose the ever-to-be-accursed monster has given an unwilling, helpless maiden to him? This is too likely. Wildly do I make plans for rescuing a captive damsel from the foul enchanter. No knight-errant was ever so truly pledged to one service and one mistress as I. None of them ever burned so valiantly against oppression.

I meet a glance from Evelyn's eyes, which, read by the light of this new idea, says : *Deliver me.* My heart burns fiercely with scorn and rage against Duncan Rufus MacPhoole.

And yet perhaps Mrs. Latimer was wrong after all. Reports are always false. But still she always knows every scrap of gossip, and is generally right.

At this moment he is handing Evelyn a menu-card. My jealous eyes eagerly look to see if their hands linger in the exchange. Yes! Surely he might have loosed the card *quite* half a second before he did. I scowl with ineffectual rage.

By this time the fish has gone away, and I have not spoken to Miss Fortescue yet. Here she takes the matter into her own hands.

"I have bought a new pug," she says, "and Evelyn is coming to-morrow to see it. Of course you admire pugs?"

How is it everyone can read my precious secret so plainly? I have never mentioned it to anyone but Chalmers.

Without the slightest hesitation or compunction do I perjure myself by declaring to her, basely and untruly, that I adore pugs, whereas there is nothing I hate so much, except, perhaps, MacPhoole and the monster.

For fully five minutes I talk to her out of pure gratitude.

Then I fancy I hear MacPhoole say, "Trevor;" and he and Evelyn both laugh. I long for the old times when a look, a tone, was provocation enough for a quarrel. Would that my foot were on the neck of the enemy! Gladly would I spring to claim my bride over the reeking bodies of the monster and MacPhoole.

With feverish persistence I watch every movement of Evelyn's. A flower in the front of her gown becomes loose. She takes it off and lays it on the table. MacPhoole picks it up, plays with it a moment, appears to make one of his sickening jokes on it, and finally sticks it in his button-hole. How I restrain myself I don't know. I long, I burn, to punish him as he deserves. But some last remaining sparks of sanity keep me in my place. Jealousy has always been my bane, but never, never have I suffered the agonies I now endure.

"You aren't a bit like yourself to-night, Mr. Trevor," lisps Mrs. Latimer; "you have hardly spoken to me."

I say something. I don't know what.

"I thought, perhaps, you were thinking of some difficult case!"

The youngest, the most playful kitten can scratch. I am a briefless barrister! Not that there is the slightest doubt the briefs will pour in some day, only—the shower has not begun yet.

Having seen her little shaft pierce home, the innocent, babyish thing goes on, "Aren't there some stories about the old chambers you men live in?"

I tell her one of the stories that made Mr. Pickwick's blood run cold, clothed in my most harrowing language, well suited to my gloomy state of mind.

Her sweet-smiling, artificial face changes—would change colour if it could—as I tell the story, but as I finish she says, with a little shrug, "Those ghastly, *creepy* stories are rather bad form, aren't they?"

Evelyn and MacPhoole are talking all the time. Why on earth can't he speak to the girl on the other side of him? Doesn't the fellow know that common politeness forbids him to monopolise his hostess? If only I could have kept my place at the end of the table!

The glare of the lights, the rattle, the chatter, my overwhelming rage, despair, and jealousy, make me quite sick.

"I think there is going to be a thunderstorm," says Miss Fortescue; "I can see the lightning through the curtain, and I am ashamed to say I am afraid of it."

"Why?" I say, moodily, "I shouldn't care if I were killed, should you?"

"I would rather live than die," she returns, slowly.

Evidently she thinks I am mad. Perhaps I am. I feel like it.

I am consumed with impotent rage. The trammels of polite society bind me down. I may not rush away. I may not poison MacPhoole's wine, or stab him; and either of the last two would

be unmixed joy to me. But the very thought of acts so congenial brings comfort to my bloodthirsty soul. I revel in gory dreams. Alas for the days when men won their brides by the shedding of blood! Those were the times to live in. What is man now but a phlegmatic animal, laborious or luxurious, according to circumstances? I am out of all patience with my times.

Just as I reach this point there is a loud clap of thunder, followed by a vivid flash of lightning.

Evelyn starts violently, and MacPhoole lays his hand on hers, with which she has clasped the edge of the table.

Mad, unable any longer to contain my jealous rage, I spring wildly from my chair. How *dare* he?

It all passes in an instant.

Evelyn draws away her hand. Someone, I believe it is Miss Fortescue, touches my arm. I sink again into my seat, blind, choking with passion.

Somehow—I haven't the least idea how—Mrs. Latimer's glass has overturned, and the wine is running all over her gown. Very likely it is my doing. I have enough sense left to offer my serviette, and Jenkyns rushes to the rescue.

But I have no remorse. I am *glad* I have spoilt her gown. Why should a woman of her age wear such a babyish frock? With joy I remember having heard that port stains will not wash away.

"I am sorry you are so *afraid* of thunder," she says, with spiteful sweetness. Her gown is a ruin.

"I am not afraid!" I say, in my very rudest manner.

"You are very cross, though," she retorts, with as pretty a pout as she can manage.

Here I register a solemn vow never again to be one of thirteen at dinner.

I am quite sure there is no spiritual affinity between Mrs. Latimer and me, yet she says at this moment,

"Do you mind our being thirteen?" She looks up into my face, in a charming spirit of christian forgiveness.

"Do you?"

"N-no. They say, don't you know, the first one who gets up will die within a year."

I think to myself I have had enough bad luck to-night to cancel misfortune for many a year.

"I shall not get up first," says Mrs. Latimer; "not that I think there is anything in it, but, don't you know,"—she shrugs her shoulders with an affected little laugh—"Miss Bellairs will—be—the first." She says this slowly, and looks fixedly into my face.

"Good heavens!" I cry aloud, "is the——"

There is a sudden silence.

I see several people glancing at me, and whispering or shaking their heads.

The monster fixes me with his awful eye, holding a gigantic plum half-way to his mouth. The Dean, disturbed in his dinner, regards me with pious horror. Evelyn's gentle eyes are fixed on me for one moment, startled and reproachful. Why does not the earth open and swallow me?

Like the sound of trickling water in the desert, the voice of Chalmers rises, loud and hearty, addressing the man opposite to him. Everyone begins to talk again, and furiously do I execrate my madness.

But excitement and rage have upset the balance of my mind. I lose my common sense. The idea takes possession of me that this night I must give my life for Evelyn's by being the first to rise. At least the idea gradually assumes this form. It will be a glorious thing to die to save her life. Will she be sorry? Will there be tears in her lovely eyes when she hears of it? Will she weep for *me?*

But heroes must act, not dream. I fix my gaze on her. At last I see her trying to catch Lady Burliston's eye. The supreme moment has come.

"No, no," I cry, wildly; "let it be *me*. I will——"

I start up, and she rises at the same moment. Every eye is fixed on me in amazement.

Like a flash the absurdity of my behaviour appears to me. Ashamed and confused I rush to open the door.

Mrs. Latimer passes me with a sickly, simpering smile. Miss Fortescue looks straight before her. Last of all comes Evelyn. Breathlessly I fix my eyes on her. The blue eyes give one grave, reproachful look at my flushed face, and then she averts her head. Evidently she thinks I am under the influence of wine.

Frantic, stung by such a suspicion, I regain my chair somehow. Savagely, bitterly, do I attack MacPhoole on his politics, always a grand vent for one's temper. I dare not touch any more wine, my brain is on fire already.

At last the monster gives us the signal to go into the drawing-room. Ladies! What are ladies to me? There is but one in all the world for me, and another man will sit by her. But I go slowly to the drawing-room door, and from there behold Lord MacPhoole on one side of Evelyn while Chalmers stands on the other.

I go to the conservatory to cool my maddened brain. There there is no light, except when the lightning flashes, and no sound but the rumbling thunder.

Did the contemptuous fates ever toy so with any man before? Æneas, much tossed to and fro by land and sea on account of the undying anger of the cruel Juno, never suffered as I do. The pangs of jealousy are sharper than any darts.

Suddenly the drawing-room door is opened, and I hear Evelyn's sweet voice singing.

"Nought so stockish, hard, and full of rage, but music for the time

may change his nature." It calms me for a moment, but jealousy is a horrible curse, a possession. I torment myself with wondering who is turning over the leaves for her. Then they shut the door again.

Once more I ponder on my wretched self, my atrocious folly, my hopeless love. This gloomy train of thought is interrupted by voices in the little room which opens into the conservatory. I shrink into the dark shadow of a huge plant behind the door.

Evelyn and Miss Fortescue come into the conservatory.

"Is this the flower you meant, dear?" says Evelyn, as they come to a standstill before a splendid Erica.

"Yes," Miss Fortescue says; "do you think I may have this bit to paint?"

"Of course, Mildred; take as much as you can possib'y manage."

The flowers are gathered, and then Evelyn says, looking straight into my eyes without knowing it, "What is the matter with Mr. Trevor to-night?"

There is a subtle something, almost imperceptible, in her voice that makes my heart beat with a foolish joy.

"Poor man!" says Mildred Fortescue, with a little laugh, and she whispers something in Evelyn's ear.

I hold my breath to listen. I strain every power I possess, but in vain. I cannot catch a word.

Evelyn stands silent, looking down, for a minute, then she says in a low, soft voice, "How do you know?"

"I can see it."

For some moments, during which I hardly dare venture to breathe, except once when it thunders, there is silence, and then Evelyn speaks again, this time with a sort of shy gladness, "But are you *quite* sure?"

"Quite. Positive. You must have seen it ages ago yourself, dear."

"It is only sheet lightning," says Evelyn, suddenly, "let us open the door and look at it. I love lightning."

I tremble. They are coming nearer. I shrink as far back into the darkness as I may.

With some difficulty they get the door open, for it drags on the floor. I cannot conceive how it is I remain undiscovered, for several times they seem to be looking at me. Then they stand on the doorstep talking softly to each other. Evelyn's arm is round the other's waist. She looks so lovely, and is so inaccessible that I cannot help but sigh.

"What is that sound?" says Miss Fortescue.

Evelyn assures her it is nothing but distant thunder. "Comparisons are odious." Even in my unenviable state of mind I smile to hear a lover's sigh compared to thunder.

"But you are cold, dear," Evelyn adds; "you are shivering. And I forgot you did not like the lightning. How selfish I am. Let us go in at once."

"Yes, I am very cold," Miss Fortescue admits.

Then they come in, and try to shut the door.

"It is far worse than ever," Evelyn cries, pushing with both hands; "and it has always been a nasty, self-willed thing."

Pull and push as you like, sweet Evelyn, it will not shut, for a cunning stratagem has come into my head. There was a cord hanging down from the window above, and I have thrown it over the handle, and the end I hold in my hand, while a wicked smile adorns my face.

"I think I must leave it," says Evelyn, prettily panting. My heart sinks. All my subtle planning in vain! And my hands are smarting horribly with that vile cord.

"But the night-air will kill the flowers," says Miss Fortescue, with a shiver, "it is gradually shrivelling me up."

Heaven bless her! May she never shrivel!

"So it will," says Evelyn, "but you are so cold, dear. Go in, and I will try once more, for I hate giving things up, and then I will come."

I almost chuckle.

Evelyn pulls with all her might. I pull with nearly all mine until I hear the drawing-room door close behind Miss Fortescue. Suddenly she finds the door yield to her endeavours and shut with a bang.

Then she sees a man among the dark plants. With a little suppressed scream she moves towards the other door. Forgetful of the fright it must cause her, and everything else but my great love and my fear of losing her, I spring out and seize her hand.

As she catches sight of my passionate flushed face I see distinctly in her eye that she still believes me under the influence of wine. She grows white with terror, trembles, and would fall, but that I catch her in my arms.

Dumb with horror I carry her lifeless form into the little room, and lay her in a chair. She is as white as death. Mad I was before, now I am rabid. Her pulse does not beat.

I have killed her, I tell myself, as I chafe her hands. Then I pace wildly to and fro across the room. Why did I not rush from the house, regardless of everything and everybody, rather than sit down with thirteen?

I dare not summon help. I will go out by the garden-way, and put an end to my wretched existence in the river.

But I must take leave of my lady first. I kneel by her side and take her cold hand in mine. I press my lips to it. Joy! she moves; a faint colour comes into her cheeks. My late suicidal intentions all forgotten, I watch breathlessly for more signs of hope. Then it dawns on me that she has only fainted. I have never seen anyone faint before. My spirits rise to a height proportionate to the depths where they brooded before.

She opens her eyes and meets mine full of new love and joy.

"Mr. Trevor?" she says, in a faint voice of wonder, not remembering anything; then I know, as surely as though it were passing in my own mind, that the recollection of the past few minutes is coming back to her, and she shrinks away from me.

But the touch of her hand, as I hold it in mine, sends a thrill through me, and gives me new strength.

She trembles and seems afraid of me, and I do not wonder, if my face expresses all I feel.

"No, Evelyn," I say, answering her thought, forgetting how strange her name must sound from my lips, "I have not taken too much wine."

"It was only for one moment"—she says, shyly blushing, and now she no longer attempts to withdraw her hand.

"Evelyn," I say again, passionately, still kneeling by her side, and looking up into her sweet, blue eyes, "Evelyn, do you love MacPhoole?"

She smiles, she looks at the floor, the walls, anything, and at last at me. "*Place aux dames*," she says, kindly, "I want to ask you a question. What has been the matter with you to-night?"

"I was mad," I say, feeling poor and shamefaced under her clear gaze, "mad with jealousy and love, because, Evelyn, no man ever loved before as I love you." She does not frown; she does not draw away her hand. "And I was so mad that I lost all control over my brain, and my head grew full of wild fancies. They told me that when there are thirteen at dinner the first to get up dies within a year, and I brooded and brooded on this till I believed it was my sacred privilege to give my life for yours by insisting on being the first to rise."

She gently lays her hand on mine which still tightly clasps her other. This sweet action so bewilders me that I hardly know how I get through the next words. "And it was not till I had actually got up that I saw what a fool I was."

"Poor—Jack," she murmurs, softly.

"And you don't love MacPhoole?" I ask, hardly knowing what I say.

"Perhaps there *is* something in it"—she says, shyly, with the prettiest hesitation in the world, quite disregarding my question, "if—if," here she only whispers, quite close to my ear, "if *ever* I should become—Evelyn Trevor, Evelyn Bellairs *would*—be dead, wouldn't she?"

I cannot speak. I rise and kiss her on the lips. . . . .

CONSTANCE A. M. COTTERELL.

IN THE DARK.

By Mary E. Penn.

"IT is the strangest, most unaccountable thing I ever knew! I don't think I am superstitious, but I can't help fancying that ——"

Ethel left the sentence unfinished, wrinkling her brows in a thoughtful frown as she gazed into the depths of her empty tea-cup.

"What has happened?" I enquired, glancing up from the Money Article of the *Times* at my daughter's pretty, puzzled face. "Nothing uncanny, I hope? You haven't discovered that a 'ghost' is included among the fixtures of our new house?"

This new house, The Cedars, was a pretty old-fashioned river-side villa between Richmond and Kew, which I had taken furnished, as a summer residence, and to which we had only just removed.

Let me state, in parenthesis, by way of introducing myself to the reader, that I, John Dysart, am a widower with one child: the blue-eyed, fair-haired young lady who sat opposite to me at the breakfast table that bright June morning: and that I have been for many years the manager of an old-established Life Insurance Company in the City.

"What is the mystery?" I repeated, as Ethel did not reply.

She came out of her brown study, and looked at me impressively.

"It really is a mystery, papa, and the more I think of it the more puzzled I am."

"I am in the dark at present as to what 'it' may be," I reminded her.

"Something that happened last night. You know that adjoining my bedroom there is a large, dark closet, which can be used as a box or store-room?"

"I had forgotten the fact, but I will take your word for it. Well, Ethel?"

"Well, last night I was restless, and it was some hours before I could sleep. When at last I did so, I had a strange dream about that closet. It seemed that as I lay in bed I heard a noise within, as if someone were knocking at the door, and a child's voice, broken by sobs, crying piteously 'Let me out, let me out!' I thought that I got out of bed and opened the door, and there, crouching all in a heap against the wall, was a little boy; a pretty, pale little fellow of six or seven, looking half wild with fright. At the same moment I woke."

"And lo, it was a dream!" I finished. "If that is all Ethel ——"

"But it is not," she interposed. "The strangest part of the story has to come. The dream was so vivid that when I woke I sat up in

bed, and looked towards the closet door, almost expecting to hear the sounds again. Papa, you may believe me or not, but it is a fact that I *did* hear them, the muffled knocking, and the pitiful cry. As I listened, it grew fainter and fainter and at length ceased altogether. Then I summoned courage to get out of bed and open the door. There was no living creature in the place. Was it not mysterious?" she concluded. "What can it mean?"

I glanced at her with a smile, as I refolded the paper and rose from my chair.

"It means, my dear, that you had night-mare last night. Let me recommend you for the future not to eat cucumber at dinner."

"No, papa," she interrupted. "I was broad awake, and I heard the child's voice as plainly as I ever heard a sound in my life."

"Why didn't you call me?"

"I was afraid to stir till the sound had ceased; but if I ever hear it again, I will let you know at once."

"Be sure you do. Meantime, suppose you come into the garden," I continued, throwing open the French windows; "the morning air will blow all these cobwebs from your brain."

Ethel complied, and for the present I heard no more of the subject.

Some days passed away, and we began to feel quite at home in our new quarters.

A more delightful summer retreat than The Cedars could hardly be imagined, with its cool, dusky rooms, from which the sunlight was excluded by the screen of foliage outside; its trellised verandah, overgrown with creepers, and its smooth lawn, shaded by the rare old cedar-trees which gave the place its name.

Our friends soon discovered its attractions and took care that we should not stagnate for want of society. We kept open house; lawn-tennis, garden-parties, and boating excursions were the order of the day. It was glorious summer weather, the days warm and golden, the nights starlit and still.

One night, having important letters to finish, I sat up writing after all the household were in bed. The window was open, and at intervals I glanced up from my paper across the moonlit lawn, where the shadows of the cedars lay dark and motionless. Now and then a great downy moth would flutter in and hover round the shaded lamp; now and then the swallows under the eaves uttered a faint, sleepy chirp. For all other signs and sounds of life I might have been the only watcher in all the sleeping world.

I had finished my task and was just closing my writing-case when I heard a hurried movement in the room above—Ethel's. Footsteps descended the stairs, and the next moment the dining-room door opened, and Ethel appeared, in a long, white dressing-gown, with a small night-lamp in her hand.

There was a look on her face which made me start up and exclaim:

"What is the matter? What has happened?"

She set down the lamp and came towards me.

"I have heard it again," she breathed, laying her hand on my wrist.

"You have heard—what?"

"The noise in the box-room."

I stared at her a moment in bewilderment, and then half smiled.

"Oh, is that it?" I exclaimed, in a tone of relief. "You have been dreaming again, it seems."

"I have not been asleep at all," she replied. "The sounds have kept me awake. They are louder than the first time; the child seems to be sobbing and crying as if his heart would break. It is miserable to hear it."

"Have you looked inside?" I asked, impressed in spite of myself by her manner.

"No, I dared not to-night. I was afraid of seeing—something," she returned with a shiver.

"Come, we must get to the bottom of this mystery," I said cheerfully, and taking up the lamp I led the way upstairs to her room.

As the door of the mysterious closet was level with the wall, and papered like it, I did not perceive it till Ethel pointed it out. I listened with my ear close to it, but heard not the faintest sound, and after waiting a moment, threw it open and looked in, holding the lamp so that every corner was lighted. It was a cramped, close, airless place, the ceiling (which was immediately below the upper staircase) sloping at an acute angle to the floor. A glance showed me that it contained nothing but a broken chair and a couple of empty boxes.

Slightly shrugging my shoulders, I closed the door.

"Your ghost is 'vox et præterea nihil,' it seems," I remarked drily. "Don't you think, Ethel, you may have been ——"

Ethel held up her hand, motioning me to silence.

"Hark," she whispered, "there it is again! But it is dying away now. Listen ——"

I complied, half infected by her excitement, but within and without the house all was profoundly still.

"There—it has ceased," she said at length, drawing a deep breath. "You heard it, did you not?"

I shook my head. "My dear Ethel, there was nothing to hear."

She opened her blue eyes to their widest.

"Papa—am I not to believe the evidence of my own senses?"

"Not when they are affected by nervous excitement. If you give way to this fancy, you will certainly make yourself ill. See how you tremble! Come, lie down again, and try to sleep."

"Not here," she returned, glancing round with a shudder. "I shall go to the spare chamber. Nothing would induce me to spend another night in this room."

I said no more, but I felt perplexed and uneasy. It was so unlike Ethel to indulge in superstitious fancies that I began to fear she must be seriously out of health, and I resolved for my own satisfaction to have a doctor's opinion regarding her.

It happened that our nearest neighbour was a physician, whom I knew by repute, though not personally acquainted with him. After breakfast, without mentioning my intention to my daughter, I sent a note to Dr. Cameron, requesting him to call at his earliest convenience.

He came without delay : a tall, grey-bearded man of middle age, with a grave, intelligent face, observant eyes and sympathetic manner.

" His patient received him with undisguised astonishment, and on learning that he had called at my request she gave me a look of mute reproach.

" I am sorry that papa troubled you, Dr. Cameron. There is really nothing whatever the matter with me," she said.

And indeed at that moment, with flushed cheeks, and eyes even brighter than usual, she looked as little like an invalid as could well be imagined.

" My dear Ethel," I interposed, " when people take to dreaming startling dreams, and hearing supernatural sounds, it is a sign of something wrong with either mind or body—as I am sure Dr. Cameron will tell you."

The doctor started perceptibly. " Ah—is that Miss Dysart's case ? " he enquired, turning to her with a sudden look of interest.

She coloured and hesitated. " I have had a strange—experience, which papa considers a delusion. I daresay you will be of the same opinion."

" Suppose you tell me what it was ? " he suggested.

She was silent, trifling with one of her silver bangles.

" Please excuse me," she said hurriedly, at length. " I don't care to speak of it ; but papa will tell you." And before I could detain her, she had hurriedly left the room.

When we were alone he turned to me enquiringly, and in a few words I related to him what the reader already knows. He listened without interruption, and when I had finished, sat for some moments without speaking, thoughtfully stroking his beard.

He was evidently impressed by what he had heard, and I waited anxiously for his opinion. At length he looked up.

" Mr. Dysart," he said, gravely, "you will be surprised to learn that your daughter is not the first who has had this strange 'experience.' Previous tenants of The Cedars have heard exactly the sounds which she describes."

I pushed my chair back half-a-yard in my astonishment.

" Impossible ! "

He nodded emphatically.

" It is a fact, though I don't pretend to explain it. These strange

manifestations have been noticed at intervals for the last three or four years; ever since the house was occupied by a Captain Vandeleur, whose orphan nephew ——"

"Vandeleur?" I interrupted; "why, he was a client of ours. He insured his nephew's life in our office for a large amount, and ——"

"And a few months afterwards, the child suddenly and mysteriously died?" my companion put in. "A singular coincidence, to say the least of it."

"So singular," I acquiesced, "that we thought it a case for enquiry, particularly as the ex-captain did not bear the best of characters, and was known to be over head and ears in debt. But I am bound to say that after the closest investigation nothing was discovered to suggest a suspicion of foul play."

"Nevertheless there *had* been foul play," was the doctor's reply.

"You don't mean that he murdered the boy! that pretty, fragile-looking little fellow ——"

"No, he did not murder him, but he let him die," Dr. Cameron rejoined. "Perhaps you were not aware," he continued, "that the little lad was somewhat feeble in mind as well as body? I attended him more than once, at Vandeleur's request, and found that among other strange fears and antipathies he had a morbid dread of darkness. To be left alone in a dark room for only a few minutes was enough to throw him into a paroxysm of nervous excitement. His uncle—who by the way, professed more affection for him than I could quite believe in, when I noticed how the child shrank from him—consulted me as to the best means of overcoming this weakness. I strongly advised him to humour it for the present, warning him that any mental shock might endanger the boy's reason, or even his life. I little thought those words of mine would prove his death warrant."

"What do you mean?"

"Only a few days afterwards, Vandeleur locked him up all night in a dark closet, where he was found the next morning, crouching against the wall; his hands clenched, his eyes fixed and staring—dead."

"Good heavens, how horrible! But no word of this was mentioned at the inquest?"

"No; and I did not hear of it myself till long afterwards, from a woman who had been Vandeleur's housekeeper, but was too much afraid of him to betray him at the time. From her, too, I learnt by what refined cruelty the poor little lad's nerves had been shaken and his health undermined. If 'the intention makes the deed,' James Vandeleur was a murderer."

I was silent a moment, thinking, with an uncomfortable thrill, of Ethel's dream. "I wish I had never entered this ill-omened house!" I exclaimed at length. "I dread the effect of this revelation on my daughter's mind."

"Why need you tell her?" he questioned. "My advice is to say nothing more about it. The sooner she forgets the subject the better.

Send her away to the sea-side; change of air and scene will soon efface it from her memory."

He rose as he spoke, and took up his hat.

"What has become of Vandeleur?" I enquired. "I have heard nothing of him since we paid the policy."

"He has been living abroad, I believe—going to the dogs, no doubt. But he is in England now," the doctor added: "or else it was his 'fetch' which I saw at your gate the other night."

"At our gate!" I echoed in astonishment. "What the deuce was he doing there?"

"He seemed to be watching the house. It was last Sunday evening. I had been dining with friends at Richmond, and on my way back, between eleven and twelve o'clock, I noticed a man leaning over the gate of The Cedars. On hearing footsteps he turned and walked away, but not before I had caught a glimpse of his face in the moonlight."

"And you are sure it was he?"

"Almost certain—though he was greatly altered for the worse. I have a presentiment do you know, that you will see or hear of him yourself before long," he added thoughtfully, as he shook hands and went his way.

I lost no time in following his advice with regard to Ethel, whom I despatched to Scarborough, in charge of my married sister, a few days later.

I had taken a hearty dislike to The Cedars, and resolved to get it off my hands as soon as might be.

Until another tenant could be found however, I continued to occupy it, going to and from town as before.

One evening I was sitting on the lawn, smoking an after-dinner cigar, and re-reading Ethel's last letter, which quite reassured me as to her health and spirits, when our sedate old housekeeper presented herself with the information that "a party" had called to see the house.

"A gentleman or a lady?" I enquired.

"A gentleman, sir, but he didn't give his name."

I found the visitor standing near the open window of the drawing-room; a tall, gaunt man of thirty-five or thereabouts, with handsome but haggard features, and restless dark eyes. His lips were covered by a thick moustache, which he was nervously twisting as he stood looking out at the lawn.

"This house is to be let, I believe; will you allow me to look over it?" he asked, turning towards me as I entered.

His voice seemed familiar; I looked at him more closely, and then, in spite of the change in his appearance, I recognised Captain Vandeleur.

What could have brought him here, I wondered. Surely he would not care to return to the house, even if he were in a position

to do so—which, judging from the shabbiness of his appearance, seemed very doubtful.

Half-a-dozen vague conjectures flashed through my mind, as I glanced at his face, and noticed the restless, "hunted" look which told of some wearing dread or anxiety.

After a moment's hesitation I assented to his request, and resolved to conduct him myself on his tour of inspection.

"I think I have met you before," I said, feeling curious to know whether he recollected me.

He glanced at me absently.

"Possibly—but not of late years; for I have been living abroad," was his reply.

Having shown him the apartments on the ground-floor, I led the way upstairs. He followed me from room to room in an absent, listless fashion, till we came to the chamber which Ethel had occupied. Then his interest seemed to revive all at once.

He glanced quickly round the walls, his eyes resting on the door of the box-closet.

"That is a bath or dressing-room, I suppose," he said, nodding towards it.

"No, only a place for lumber. Perhaps I ought to tell you that it is said to be haunted," I added, affecting to speak carelessly, while I kept my eyes on his face.

He started and turned towards me.

"Haunted—by what?" he enquired, with a faint sneer. "Nothing worse than rats or mice, I expect."

"There is a tragical story connected with that place," I answered, deliberately. "It is said that an unfortunate child was shut up there to die of fear, in the dark."

The colour rushed to his face, then retreated, leaving it deadly white.

"Indeed!" he faltered; "and do you mean to say that he—the child—has been seen?"

"No, but he has been heard, knocking within, and crying to be let out. The fact is confirmed by every tenant who has occupied the house since ——"

I stopped short, startled by the effect of my revelation.

My companion was gazing at me with a blank stare of horror which banished all other expression from his face.

"Good heavens!" I heard him mutter; "can it be true? Can this be the reason why I was drawn back to the place in spite of myself?"

Recollecting himself, however, he turned to me, and forced his white lips into a smile.

"A mysterious story!" he commented, drily. "I don't believe a word of it, myself, but I should hardly care to take a house with such an uncanny reputation. I think I need not trouble you any further."

As he turned towards the door, I saw his figure sway as if he were

falling. He put his hand to his side, with a gasp of pain, a bluish shade gathering over his face.

"Are you ill?" I exclaimed, in alarm.

"I—it is nothing. I have a weakness of the heart, and I am subject to these attacks. May I ask you for a glass of water?"

I left the room to procure it. When I returned I found that he had fallen upon the bed in a dead swoon.

I hastily despatched a servant for Dr. Cameron, who happened to be at home, and came immediately.

He recognised my visitor at once, and glanced at me significantly. I rapidly explained what had happened, while he bent over the unconscious man, and bared his chest to listen to the heart-beats.

When he raised himself his face was ominously grave.

"Is he in danger?" I asked, quickly.

"Not in immediate danger, but the next attack will probably be his last. His heart is mortally diseased."

It was nearly an hour before Vandeleur awoke, and then only to partial consciousness. He lay in a sort of stupor, his limbs nerveless, his hands damp and cold.

"It is impossible to remove him in this condition," the doctor remarked; "I fear he must stay here for the night. I will send you someone to watch him."

"Don't trouble—I intend to sit up with him myself," I replied, speaking on an impulse I could hardly explain.

He looked at me keenly over his spectacles.

"Should you like me to share your watch?" he enquired, after a moment.

"I shall be only too glad of your company, if you can come without inconvenience."

He nodded.

"I must leave you now, but I will return in an hour," he responded.

Three hours had passed away; it was nearly midnight. The night was oppressively close, and profoundly still. The bedroom window stood wide open, but not a breath of air stirred the curtains. Outside, all was vague and dark, for neither moon nor stars were visible.

Vandeleur still lay, half-dressed, on the bed, but now asleep. His deep, regular breathing sounded distinctly in the silence. Dr. Cameron sat near the dressing-table, reading by the light of a shaded lamp. I, too, had a book, but found it impossible to keep my attention fixed upon it. My mind was possessed by an uneasy feeling, half dread, half expectation. I found myself listening nervously to fancied sounds, and starting when the doctor turned a leaf.

At length, overcome by the heat and stillness, I closed my eyes, and unconsciously sank into a doze. How long it lasted I cannot tell, but I woke abruptly, and looked round with a sense of vague alarm. I glanced at the doctor. He had laid down his book, and was leaning

forward with one arm on the dressing-table, looking intently towards the door of the box-room. Instinctively I held my breath and listened.

Never shall I forget the thrill that ran through my nerves when I heard from within a muffled knocking sound, and a child's voice, distinct, though faint, and broken by sobs, crying piteously : "Let me out—let me out!"

"Do you hear?" I whispered, bending forward to my companion.

He inclined his head in assent and motioned me to be silent, pointing towards the bed. Its occupant moved uneasily, as if disturbed, muttering some incoherent phrases. Suddenly he pushed back his covering and sat upright, gazing round with a wild, bewildered stare.

The pitiful entreaty was repeated more violently, more passionately than before. "Let me out, let me out!"

With a cry that rang through the room, Vandeleur sprang from the bed, reached the closet door in two strides and tore it open.

It was empty. Empty at least to our eyes, but it was evident that our companion beheld what we could not.

For a few breathless seconds he stood as if frozen, his eyes fixed with the fascination of terror on something just within the threshold; then, as if retreating before it, he recoiled step by step across the room till he was stopped by the opposite wall, where he crouched in an attitude of abject fear.

The sight was so horrible that I could bear it no longer.

"Are you dreaming? wake up!" I exclaimed, and shook his shoulder.

He raised his eyes, and looked at me vacantly. His lips moved, but no sound came from them. Suddenly a convulsive shudder ran through him and he fell heavily forward at my feet.

"He has swooned again," I said turning to my companion, who stooped and lifted the drooping head on to his knee.

After one glance, he laid it gently down again.

"He is dead," was his grave reply.

And with Vandeleur's death my story ends, for after that night the sounds were heard no more.

The forlorn little ghost was at rest.

MY DARLING.

She stood among the lilies in the wood,
As pure, as bright, as innocently fair,
In the first blush of opening maidenhood,
As the white bells which glisten'd where she stood.
The sunbeams gleam'd amid her golden hair
The soft warm breezes shyly round her stray'd,
For her delight the wood-bird perch'd and sung,
The still dark branches fondly o'er her hung;
On her white dress the dappling shadows play'd,
And Nature wooed her darling everywhere.
And I, who knew her good as she was sweet,
And not more beautiful than she was true,
Brought with the rest my homage to her feet,
And gained in giving greater than I knew.

To-day she sits beside me as I write
Who fifty years has shared my woe and weal;
Still, as at first, my darling and delight,
In age as lovely as in girlhood bright;
For Time remain'd to give, who came to steal,
And so he scattered silver on her gold,
And gave a lily where Youth gave a rose,
And changed the quicker grace for that repose
Which falls, a peaceful twilight, on the old.
And, if he traced his lines upon her brow,
They do but speak to me of sorrows shared,
And hearts shown brave in bearing them, and how
'Mid suns that ripen'd, blasts that kill'd and bared,
A perfect love wrought out our marriage vow.

Mary Blanche Hayward.

J. Ogden and Co., Printers, 172, St. John Street, London, E.C.

M. ELLEN STAPLES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"NEVER TR E, GIRLS," CRIED POOR MRS. JUNIPER, "IF YOUR PAPA'S NOT BRINGING HIM IN HERE!"

THE

SUMMER SUPPLEMENT

OF

THE ARGOSY.

THE SURGEON'S DAUGHTERS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

LOVE.

DO you happen to be acquainted with the Faithful City of Worcester?—The loyal city which, in its trueheartedness, remained firm to its unhappy king, Charles the Martyr, with his son, when all other of his towns had turned against him, and so earned the right to be called Faithful for ever? If a stranger, you cannot do better than pay a day's visit to it: you may go to many a town less worth seeing. Whilst your dinner is preparing at the Star and Garter—at which dinner you must beg the host not to forget the Severn salmon, and the far-famed lampreys, fatal in his day to the First Henry—go on a tour of inspection through the city. Taking its cathedral first: and when you have looked at its renovated grandeur; at its cold, handsome monuments, erected to the memory of those who have long been colder than they are, and admired its beauteous east-window of many colours, step into the cloisters, where the irreverent Cromwell stabled his horses, and there pause awhile over the gravestone bearing the solitary inscription "Miserrimus," and speculate upon its unhappy tenant's life and fate. Then, passing through the "Green," and the gate of Edgar Tower, turn to Chamberlain's China Factory—it has passed into other hands now, but the name "Chamberlain" still clings to it, and will cling, whilst present generations shall exist. The Worcester china is spoken of all over the world, and it deserves its reputation: in point of art and refined beauty, it yields to none. You may have been all the way to Pekin, and bought up the curious teacups and saucers there, so much lauded to untravelled people; you may be at home in all the splendours of all the departments of the Sèvres Porcelaine; but you see now they cannot surpass, if they can vie with, that produced at Worcester. Turning about again, from the China-works, to stand in front of the Guildhall, you admire its façade, its statues, and its conspicuous motto, "Floreat Semper, Fidelis Civitas." Did

you ever hear the anecdote connected with its body-corporate of other days, when George the Third was king? His Majesty visited the Faithful City, staying in it a few days: and this most loyal corporation exercised their brains devising ways and means of showing their fealty: as, between ourselves, corporations do still: which, it is said, were well and duly appreciated. When the addressing, and the feasting, and all the rest of it was over, and the king was preparing to leave the town, one last and final attention was projected by the body-corporate. A deputation of them waited on their august guest, obtained an audience, and solicited "the honour of escorting his Majesty to the gallows." The King stared, laughed, and thought he would rather be excused. They had omitted to explain that they merely wished to pay his Majesty the respect of attending him out of the town as far as the spot where the gallows for the condemned criminals stood. It was at the top of Red Hill. The King gave permission to *that.*

The inhabitants of Worcester are said to deserve the initials P. P. P. affixed to their names, denoting Poor, Proud, and Pretty. Whether, take them as a whole, they are poor, I cannot say; proud they undoubtedly are, for that is the characteristic of all cathedral towns; and you certainly cannot walk through the city without being struck with the remarkably pretty faces of the girls you meet.

At a very long-past period, so long that we elderly people can but just remember it, there lived in Worcester a surgeon and general practitioner, Mr. George Juniper. He was a little man, with a fair complexion and curly light hair; skilful, kind-hearted, sensible, and much esteemed by his fellow citizens. He had been in practice many years and his connexion was extensive; but he was no longer young, and began to feel the need of a little rest and less responsibility. Mr. Juniper always kept a qualified assistant, who was generally a young man; though latterly he had not been fortunate in respect to his assistants. One of them sent a patient poison in mistake for Epsom salts, which nearly cost the lady her life; another grew fonder of the billiard-table than he was of the surgery; and a third made love too conspicuously to the surgeon's daughters. So that of assistants Mr. Juniper grew weary, and thought he must try some other mode of help.

George Juniper rejoiced in seven daughters. "Seven daughters," cries the aghast old bachelor, reading this through his spectacles; "was he mad?" Well, sometimes they did nearly enough to drive him so, had he been less good-humoured and indulgent. But he could not lay the claim of paternity to all the seven. It had happened in this way:

There resided in Worcester, again many years back even from this, an old gentleman of the name of Battlebridge. He had made a large fortune in business, and had retired to enjoy it, or a portion of it, in a great square handsome house with a large garden, keeping a cook, housemaid, and gardener, the two latter being man and wife.

Up to one-and-seventy years of age, Mr. Battlebridge had not married; consequently, his dear relatives, even to the twentieth cousin, although they were all well off, were excessively attentive and affectionate towards him, calling upon him and carrying him presents of jam and flannel nightcaps a great deal oftener than he wanted them. But one day it was disclosed to the old gentleman, that a graceless nephew of his had avowed, the previous night, in a mixed society, that not one of them "cared a rap for the old man; all they wanted was that he should betake himself off, so that they might inherit his gold."

Whilst Mr. Battlebridge was digesting this agreeable news, there burst into his parlour his cook and housekeeper, Molly; her cheeks crimson, and her voice angry. She had been having another breeze with the gardener and his wife, such breezes being pretty common, and had come to give warning. Now Molly was a superior young woman and good girl, who looked after her master's comforts, and old Battlebridge would as soon have lost his right hand.

"It's two to one," cried Molly, turning her comely face to her master. "What chance have I against them? They are always on at me: and Mark is the most overbearing man alive. If you don't like to pay me my wages, sir, and let me be off this day, I'll leave without them."

"I'll make it two to two for you, Molly, if you will, and then you can have fair play," responded the old gentleman.

"How will you do that, master?" asked Molly, her passion a little abating, and her pretty mouth breaking into a smile.

"Why I'll marry you myself," returned old Battlebridge.

"I am not in a humour to be joked with," retorted Molly, becoming wrathful again. "Do you please to pay me sir, or not?"

"I am not joking," he replied. "I'll get the license to-day, and marry you to-morrow."

And old Battlebridge did so: and from that time Molly sat in the parlour with him, and became as much of a lady as she could, and was Mrs. Battlebridge. Worcester made a great commotion at the news; the relatives made a greater. "Married indeed, when he ought to have died!" they cried; and they declared that had they known of it beforehand, they would have shut him up in the madhouse at Droitwich.

Three little girls were born to old Battlebridge, and then he died, leaving his whole property to his wife and children. The relations threw it into Chancery, like the simpletons they were, for they had not a leg to stand upon. One of them acknowledged that they had done it in a moment of exasperation: and exasperation, mind you, has been more productive to Chancery than any other passion. The money came out of it just halved in value, thanks to the case being minus the said leg: had it possessed but the shadow of one, it would never have come out at all. But there was a great deal left

yet; quite enough to tempt many a suitor to pay court to the comely Widow Battlebridge. The successful one was Surgeon Juniper; and the Faithful City wondered. It wondered that he, being a gentleman in mind and manners, should take to himself a vulgar wife: but the surgeon, without so much as a wry face, gulped down the pill for the sake of the gilt that covered it.

That the new Mrs. Juniper was in a degree vulgar, nobody could deny: she was growing plump; she had not abandoned her homely speech and grammar, and had not tried to: but she possessed many redeeming qualities. She was gentle-tempered, kind-hearted, benevolent to the poor, an excellent wife, mistress, and mother; and many a well-born lady in the city was glad to shake hands with her, and to pay her the respect she deserved. At the time of Mr. Juniper's marriage with her he was a widower, and the father of three little girls; her three little damsels made six; and one, who was born after the double second marriage of the parties, made the seventh. So that is how Mr. Juniper counted his daughters.

The little girls grew up in course of time to be young women, well-educated and lady-like, but full of fun amidst themselves. Two of them—the eldest in each family—soon married; Ann Juniper to a merchant in Liverpool; Mary Battlebridge to a gentleman-farmer in Worcestershire.

It was about this time that the following advertisement appeared in the *Worcester Journal* and also in the *Times:* such advertisements being less common in those days than they are in these.

"To the Medical Profession: A gentleman fully qualified as surgeon, &c., possessing money to purchase a share in a practice, may hear of something desirable by applying to G. J., Post Office, Worcester."

The advertisement was Mr. Juniper's. He received sundry answers to it, and concluded a negociation.

Mr. Juniper's house, large and commodious, stood in one of the principal streets. Entering from its pillared portico, rooms opened on each hand: the dining-room on the right, the parlour on the left; the drawing-room was above. All these rooms faced the street. Mr. Juniper's professional rooms and surgery were at the back, close to the side entrance.

The parlour was appropriated to the young ladies, to their occupations and amusements. You never saw so untidy a place in your life: one with the bump of order would, upon entering it, have run away in dismay. An old piano stood on one side, a key or two missing and a dozen of its wires—it had been the girls' practising piano when they were children; a set of bookshelves rose opposite, piled with books in the greatest confusion; writing-desks lay about, some on the floor, some tumbling off chairs; sheets of music, in all stages of tearing and copying; workboxes stood open, some without lids, others without bottoms, their contents, all entangled to-

gether in one appalling mess; pens, pencils, paints, French crayons, palettes, chalks, work, thimbles, keys, notes, and scrap-books were scattered everywhere; whilst the chairs and the carpet were worn, and the table-covers frayed.

In this room, one evening in spring, were all the girls, gathered round a blazing fire, sitting, kneeling, or standing. The two Miss Junipers were little, fair, slender young women, very near-sighted, with hair remarkably light; whilst the daughters of the late Mr. Battlebridge were tall, buxom girls, with dark eyes and arched eyebrows; and the youngest, Georgiana, half-sister to all the others, was the beauty of the family. She was now eighteen, and was thought a great deal of by her sisters in general, and by herself in particular, and she had always been indulged. They were bustling, accomplished, good-natured girls, much liked in society: but their mother possessed stricter notions of right and wrong than does many a one who has been better born, and she "kept them under," and saw more strictly after them than the girls liked. So they looked forward with ardent hope to the time when they should be married, and become their own mistresses. Are there many girls who do not?—especially when they find they have left their teens behind them more years than they would care to tell.

On this evening, in their own parlour, they were chattering by firelight; just the nonsense that girls do chatter. Their theme was their father's new partner, who was expected on the morrow.

"I'll tell you what, Julia," observed Miss Elizabeth Juniper, "I have got him in my mind's eye exactly, just his portrait."

"Let us have it, Bessy," was the response of Miss Battlebridge.

"You remember that precious assistant papa had two years ago, with a nose like a monkey's and a waist like an elephant's? I'd not mind betting a new fan he will be just such another man."

"Green spectacles and all?"

"Green spectacles and all: or, perhaps an eye-glass by way of a change. We will turn him over to Cicely; she used to admire the elephant; and he admired her I think."

"You may call him an elephant and a monkey now," cried Miss Cicely Juniper, nodding her head, "but you were all setting your caps at him then."

"Just hark at Cicely!"

"He will not concern me," interrupted Georgiana, tossing back her pretty auburn curls, in the self-sufficiency of her youth and beauty, "for I know he will be as old as papa. I shall begin to call him 'uncle' as soon as he comes."

"Who's this?" exclaimed Kate Battlebridge, turning sharply round as the door opened, and a lady, attired in grass-green silk and white lace cap with pink ribbons, entered.

"It's only mamma. What are you coming in here for, mamma?"

"Why, the truth is, girls, I dozed asleep in the twilight, and the

fire went almost out, so I am come in while they blow it up," replied Mrs. Juniper. She was stout now and pretty red, and she *would* dress in bright colours; but her face was comely yet, and her voice kindly as ever. "Move away a bit, Bessy, and let one see the fire."

Miss Elizabeth, pushing her sisters closer together, made room for Mrs. Juniper, without losing her own place in the circle.

"We have been wondering what the new doctor will be like, mamma."

"Just like your silliness, girls: wondering your time away to waste. If I were you, I'd rather spend it putting this room straight. He'll be here to-morrow night, and then you'll see. I have been thinking what I had better get for his supper."

"Tea, mamma," interrupted the young ladies.

"Tea indeed!" ejaculated Mrs. Juniper, indignantly. "If any of you took a journey of six-and-twenty miles on a stage coach, you'd be glad of something substantial to eat at the end of it. What do you think of a fine savoury duck, nicely stuffed with sage and onions?"

The girls screamed, laughed, and did not approve of the dish at all. Bessy Juniper suggested an improvement.

"Have the tea nicely laid, mamma, with watercress and small rolls," she said, "and get in a little potted meat——"

"Potted donkey!" interrupted her mother, sharply. "Do you think your papa is going to take a partner to starve him?"

"Potted meats are the fashion now," Bessy ventured to remark.

"For full people; not for empty ones," retorted the hospitably-inclined lady. But before the discussion could be continued, the door again opened, and a servant, looking in, said, "Miss Erskine's here, young ladies."

The five girls started up, and hugged their visitor nearly to death. She was a very lovely girl, even for Worcester, with her dark blue eyes, her exquisite complexion, and her raven hair: and though she was young, and slight, and gentle, she had a self-possessed manner and a haughty step.

"This is kind, Florence," they cried; "we have been so stupid all the evening! Take your things off. We were going to send for you to-morrow night, to see the lion arrive."

"The what?" asked the young lady.

"Papa's new partner. He is coming by the Cheltenham coach. Bessy vows he'll be an elephant. And we are afraid he's old."

"And in the name of fortune, what difference should it make to you girls if he is old?" demanded Mrs. Juniper, turning round upon them, after shaking hands with Florence.

"Oh—he may not like our noise; our music, and that, if he is old," answered Kate, glancing at the rest.

"The preliminaries are arranged, then?" remarked Miss Erskine.

"Yes they are, my dear," said Mrs. Juniper. "So far as that

the gentleman is coming for six months upon trial. A trial for both parties, you know, Miss Florence, which is only fair."

"Of course it is," said Florence. "What is his name?"

"His name is the only item in the correspondence that we don't like," said Mrs. Juniper. "It's French. But he tells us he is thorough, genuine English. He is a Mr. de Courcy."

"Formerly spelt Coursée, I believe," said Julia Battlebridge. "We are dying to see what he's like," she continued in a low voice to Florence. "And we have got such pretty new dresses; challis, trimmed with green satin: we mean to put them on to-morrow night."

"Put on what?" asked Mrs. Juniper, who caught the last words.

"Our best behaviour," cried Julia, promptly.

But Mrs. Juniper's ears had been quick. "Put on your new challis, will you! Look here, girls: you will not set up any of your nonsensical flirting with this gentleman. Neither your papa nor me would allow it: mind that."

"Oh dear, *no*," cried the girls promptly in answer. "Why we are expecting him to be as old as Adam! Mamma, don't you think your fire's burnt up?"

"Here's the Cheltenham coach; the one he will come by to-morrow evening," exclaimed Cicely, as a resounding horn was heard. "He is from London, Florence; but he took Cheltenham on his road down, to see some friends."

"How that guard's a blowing!" ejaculated Mrs. Juniper.

"And the coach has slackened its speed as if it were going to stop."

"It is stopping," said Mrs. Juniper.

"And at our house too! and a gentleman——Oh mamma!" broke off Cicely, in excitement, "he is come to-night!"

"Who is come?" asked Mrs. Juniper.

"Why *he*, Mr. de Courcy. It must be! Now he is paying the guard—and now they are getting down his luggage—and now he is knocking at the door. What *shall* we do in these old merino frocks? Is there time to dress?"

"Bother to dressing!" put in the startled Mrs. Juniper, "what's to be done about supper? Nothing on earth in the house but some cold hashed mutton and a round of beef in pickle. Ring the bell for the cook: or one of you girls run and tell her to come to me: she must send out for——Never trust me," broke off poor Mrs. Juniper, "if your papa's not bringing him in here!"

It was quite true. Mr. Juniper, seeing that the dining-room fire looked cold and black, ushered him into the girls' parlour, where he knew there was always a blazing one. He had been so long used to its litter that he thought nothing of it, and it never occurred to him to ask what a stranger might think. The girls, in spite of their dismay, took in the visitor's appearance at a glance.

A tall, prepossessing man, some years under thirty, gentlemanly in

manner, free and pleasant in speech, with a rather sallow complexion, dark eyes, handsome features, and a winning smile. They could not well have seen one less like an elephant, or a monkey in spectacles. He laughed at their apologies about "the wrong room," and the "girls' parlour," and was at home with them at once.

Louis de Courcy—"Lewis," it had been always called, he told them, according to English pronunciation—was born in England of French parents; his ancestors had been scared from their own land at the time of the great French revolution, and had never returned to it. Louis, the youngest of a large family, had grown up in the entire habits of an Englishman, and, but for his name, none could have suspected that any other country than this could put in a claim to him. He had been highly educated, was clever in his profession, and had fair prospects as regarded money. When he reached Cheltenham, he had found his friends there in deep distress on account of a death in their house, so he had come on to Worcester.

Before Mr. de Courcy had been a week in the surgeon's house, he was a favourite with all its inmates, from Mr. Juniper himself down to Dick, the surgery-boy. Extremely clever, extremely eloquent, or, if we may be permitted to use the expression of Mrs. Juniper, "favoured with the gift of the gab," he took the good-will of people by storm, and the girls were convinced that a more desirable man as a husband-in-prospective was not to be found. But they could not all marry him: that was clear: so he was, by tacit consent, turned over to gladden the hopes of Georgiana, the others making themselves as agreeable with him as so many elder sisters. To Georgiana was left all the rights of flirting, and she did not fail to exercise them on her own account; de Courcy himself proving nothing loth, for he was fully awake to the charms of a pretty girl.

"It would be delightful for Georgy to be settled near us: and de Courcy would have to live quite close, being papa's partner," the girls remarked one to another. "We might spend half our time there."

Indeed, to have a married sister thus established they had long regarded as the most fortunate thing that could happen to them—always excepting their own marriage—for at her house they could flirt away at leisure, secure from the discerning eyes of Mrs. Juniper. So the girls set themselves honestly to work to further the flirtation between de Courcy and Georgiana. In all their walks and rambles, Georgy was left to his care: in all the evening parties, and they went to many, he was sure to be her especial cavalier: it was to her his arm was given, when it was given at all: it was to her singing his voice would be heard as second. When he came into the girls' parlour for ten minutes' chat, the seat next Georgy was at once vacated to him: more than all, when he would be in the humour to breathe words of tender nonsense, in reality meaning nothing, but to a girl's heart implying much, it was into Georgy's ear they were whispered. De Courcy was by nature thoughtless, careless of consequences: he

never reflected that these attentions might appear to other people to bear a serious meaning, or that he might be initiating Georgiana, for the first time in her life, into the art of love—to love *him.*

We must now turn to the subject and to the abode of Captain Erskine; who exemplified in his own person the truth of two of the attributes accorded to Worcester generally—poor and proud. Poor he was; very; and from no man, living within the city's walls, did exclusive notions of hauteur more fully shine forth, than from Florence's father, Captain Erskine. In regard to family, he stood on the very loftiest pinnacle; his ancestors had been the highest of the high. They were descended originally from royalty, and in later periods had owned lords and chancellors for cousins. He had got his pedigree, setting forth all this, framed and glazed, and hanging up in his sitting-room. That he was of good descent, appeared to be the fact; but he boasted of it in so ridiculous a manner as to have acquired the name in the town, derisively applied, of Gentleman Erskine. He held up his head, and literally looked down upon everybody. He was gracious with the Dean when he met him, and condescended to exchange bows with the prebends, but he looked straight over the hats of the minor canons; of other people he took no notice. But fortune, alas, had not been so prodigal to Gentleman Erskine as his rank and his merits deserved; therefore, he lived a most retired life. Want of means did not allow him to frequent the society of the great; the little were beneath him. It was with much pinching and screwing that he contrived to make both ends meet, when the expenses of his pretty little cottage, just outside the town, containing his daughter and their one maid-servant, were settled at the end of each year. He had sold out of the army before his wife died, and what his small income really was, no one knew.

Florence, brought up in these exclusive notions, had been allowed to cultivate the acquaintance of none. Whether the Captain expected a lord would drop from the sky some day and pick her up, he did not say, but he certainly allowed her no opportunity to mix with any of inferior rank, except the Junipers. Years back, when Mr. Juniper was attending the Captain professionally, he, the good-natured surgeon, pitying the isolated condition of the little girl, and the lack of means to afford her suitable instruction, proposed that she should come to his house daily, and partake (gratuitously) of the music and drawing lessons of Georgiana. Gentleman Erskine was too much impressed with the advantages of the proposal to decline it: though he considered the Juniper family amply repaid by the condescension. Hence had arisen Florence's intimacy at the surgeon's, and it was now so much a thing of habit, that it never occurred to her father to put a stop to it. Still he did not cease to remind Florence from time to time that though very worthy people in their way, those Junipers, they were persons whom she must not, even in thought, exalt into a level with their own sphere of life.

Florence dutifully listened: but she wished with her whole heart that all such exclusiveness was buried at the bottom of the sea.

Shortly after the arrival of Mr. de Courcy, it happened that a distant relative of Captain Erskine's, a Mr. Stanton, was passing through Worcester, and halted there for a day. He was an old man, somewhat feeble, and in descending the stairs at the Hop-pole, then the principal inn of the city, he fell and broke his leg. He received also an internal injury; and, altogether, it was a doubt whether he would ever leave the town again. When able to be removed from the Hop-pole, apartments were taken for him in Foregate Street, and there he lay still, Captain Erskine dining and spending the evening of every day with him. It was said in the town that the Captain had expectations from him, and that of course it caused him to be attentive. Through these repeated absences from home of her father, Florence was enabled, unquestioned, to spend every evening, if she so willed it, at Mrs. Juniper's.

Oh, silly girls! you four elder Miss Junipers! You have but little forethought. You have set your minds upon Georgiana's gaining de Courcy, yet you daily throw into his society one more beautiful and not less attractive than she is! Florence was for ever being sent for by them: and she went. The evenings were growing long then, and sometimes all the girls in a body would take her home, and sometimes de Courcy himself was her only companion. Florence had never been brought into contact with a man so fascinating. It is true his manners to her were not of that free, gallant, openly-attentive nature displayed to Georgiana, but there was a subdued tenderness in them when alone with her, infinitely more dangerous. Ah, readers! it is the old tale: Gentleman Erskine might impress upon his daughter the superiority of her descent to those around her, might descant upon it from night to morn; but he could not arrest this new, all-absorbing passion that was taking root in her heart. There is one thing makes its way in spite of all things—love.

It is dangerous to a girl's peace, let me tell you, ay and to a woman's also, to be alone with an attractive companion of the other sex in the quiet evening hours. Florence would leave the surgeon's pretty early, by half-past eight or so, de Courcy with her to see her safely home. The house was not far off. When there, she would lay her bonnet and scarf on the table of the little drawing-room, and leaning out at the open window, play with the jessamine and honeysuckle that grew round its frame; not that she cared for jessamine or honeysuckle just then. De Courcy, sitting by her, would converse upon no end of subjects—I hardly know what, but if you have ever made one in these stolen interviews, you can tell. He was trying to improve her French accent; teaching her to speak whole sentences in the language; making her conjugate its verbs, *aimer* amongst the rest. Florence would begin her lesson: she was not very perfect in the verbs, especially the reflective verbs; they puzzled her: "Je

m'aime, tu t'aimes, il s'aime; nous nous ——," and there she would stop. "Nous nous aimons," de Courcy would break in, with his low, silvery voice. It really was a musical voice, but had it been of a crow's harshness, it would still have been silvery to her ear.

"Nous nous aimons," de Courcy would go on, Florence repeating it after him, her heart beating, and her cheek blushing. He could see the blushes in the soft twilight of the evening, and she would turn her face from him, in its sweet consciousness, leaving nothing visible to his sight, save its exquisite profile. They would rarely get to the end of the verb. De Courcy would begin upon some subject more attractive: the bright stars, perhaps, that were beginning to shine, or the pleasant look of the landscape as it cast forth its light and shade in the moonlight. The cottage stood upon a gentle eminence, and commanded an extensive view of the lovely county, than which none more beautiful can be seen in England. The long chain of the Malvern Hills bounded the landscape in the distance, and de Courcy was wont to declare that the clustering white houses beneath the hills of Great Malvern looked like fairy sea-shells embedded amidst moss. The remark has been previously recorded elsewhere: but in truth it was often made. Thus they would wander on insensibly to dearer subjects, he reciting sweet verses at intervals, until they were both rapt in a maze of poetry and impassioned feeling. Byron's poems, Moore's strains, both more new to the world than they are now; any romance, in short, that he could call to memory. And, during all this time, through the French, and the verbs, and the talking, and the poetry, he was sure to have stolen one of her hands, and to hold it clasped in his. Who would give five shillings now for the chance of Georgy Juniper?

One evening, either the young surgeon had remained too long, or Captain Erskine came home before his usual hour, but as they stood there, Florence was startled at the sight of her father coming up the road. She closed the window, rang the bell in hasty trepidation for candles, and just as the maid—who had had sweethearts herself, and was awake to things—scuffled them on to the table, and de Courcy rose and stood with his hat in his hand, Captain Erskine entered. A ceremonious bow between the two gentlemen, courteous on de Courcy's part, stiff and forced on the Captain's, and the former said good-night, and was gone.

"Why, bless my soul, Florence!" uttered the astounded aristocrat, looking round to be sure that he was not dreaming, "it was that French fellow of Juniper's!"

She made some answer, quite unconscious what it was. Fortunately the Captain was too much ruffled to listen.

"Pray what brought *him* here?"

"I—he——" Florence began in her terror and agitation, and then she could get no further: as we all know, conscience does make the very best of us cowards. So she coughed a sharp succession of

coughs, as if something had got into her throat, and turned to the window and began pulling about the muslin curtains: anything to gain time and calmness.

"What's the matter with the curtains?" he continued, sharply. "I ask you what on earth brought that partner of Juniper's here? He was actually sitting down when I first saw him. Sitting down! my eyes could not have deceived me."

"He brought this French book of Elizabeth Juniper's," she stammered, indicating a small French story-book; and, so far, that was true. Bessy had lent it to her and he carried it home in his hand. "And I was at fault in my verbs, papa, and he offered to set me right!"

True again. At least, tolerably so. Ah, good sir, good Paterfamilias, groaning over these pages and Florence's degeneracy, do you imagine your own girls tell you the whole truth always? You were young and in love once: how much did you tell in that golden time?

"The devil take the French and their verbs and all connected with them," shrieked Captain Erskine. "How dare you stoop to put yourself upon a level with a common fellow of a doctor?"

"Dear papa," said Florence, bursting into agitated tears. "I thought it no harm to ask him about the French verbs."

"There's every harm," retorted Gentleman Erskine. "Do you forget, Florence, who and what we are descended from? There's not a family in the county can boast the antiquity of ours; and here I come home and find a professional man's assistant sitting in the same room with you—*sitting!*—quite familiar—admitted to an equality! Some unheard-of French jackanapes, who may never have had a grandfather!"

"I am very sorry," murmured Florence.

"Sorry! that's not the word for it: you ought to be ashamed. If the individual should come up again, let the servant take his message from him at the door, and dismiss him civilly—very strange that the Miss Junipers cannot send a maid with their commissions!"

Florence sighed, and was wisely silent.

"You are getting too old now, Florence, to continue your intimacy with these Junipers," proceeded Gentleman Erskine, loftily. "They were certainly kind to you, and all that, and when you were younger it did not so much signify; but it won't do now. Don't go there again. Or, at any rate, but very rarely; and let the acquaintanceship gradually drop."

Captain Erskine stopped at that. He supposed he had said all that was necessary, for it never occurred to his exclusive mind to suspect that his daughter could be more tolerant on the subject of "family" than himself. What if he had been in a corner of the room that very evening, and seen all the tacit love-making? He might have vanished through the floor with the shock, after the manner of the imps in the pantomimes.

Thus Georgiana Juniper regarded Louis de Courcy as her own

particular knight, but so did Florence Erskine. Each believed that she possessed his heart, his sole allegiance. Each of them loved him in return. Georgiana in but a light degree; Florence passionately and enduringly. Her intellect was of a higher order than Georgiana's; she had more imagination, more dreamy sentiment: and it is precisely in such natures that love takes the deepest hold.

And what thought Mr. de Courcy? It was impossible that he could remain wholly blind to the present aspect of affairs, and he began to doubt whether he had not got himself into what the Americans call a "fix." That it was his own fault, entirely the result of his thoughtlessness, was no consolation at all; quite the contrary. He could not fail to see that Georgiana liked him, if she did not love, and he awoke to the fact that he was expected by the other girls to make love to her. He had no true love to give her: all his hopes were concentrated on Florence. The course of true love never yet ran smooth; we learnt that in our copy-books: in this case there seemed to be a likelihood of its running rather rough. Why could not Mr. de Courcy have fallen outright in love with Georgy Juniper, and married her with her parents' consent, as he might have done, and so have found his future path all straight before him? Why should he have remained wholly insensible (always excepting the flirting) to her attractions, and plunged over head and ears in love with one, whom there was little more chance of his winning and wearing, than there was of his winning the stately daughter of the good old bishop at the palace? It must have been fate, I think; or, something in the air.

It has been asserted that love cannot exist without jealousy. Love is wonderfully sharp-sighted; and, almost before there was real cause, Florence and Georgiana became jealous of one another. The elder girls were not so soon awake to danger: but a word or two, dropped by Georgy one day, in a pet, opened their eyes.

They took alarm at once, lest the desirable match they had so pleasantly carved out should drop through; and Florence was invited there no more. Not an hour did de Courcy henceforth find for himself: walks this evening, projected walks to-morrow evening, tea and parties always: and he could not escape this, unless he had been guilty of absolute discourtesy. Besides, he who had been so thoughtlessly officious in seeking the society of Georgiana, could not abruptly forswear it in rudeness now.

Elizabeth Juniper resolved to put the matter at rest: so the next time she was alone with Mr. de Courcy she mentioned, apparently quite incidentally, that Florence Erskine was engaged to be married.

"To be married!" uttered de Courcy, the red colour flushing into his sallow cheek.

"Did you not know it?" asked Elizabeth. "She is to marry her cousin, Bob Erskine."

De Courcy reflected. He was nearly sure he had heard Florence speak of a cousin "Bob."

"You don't know Gentleman Erskine," she went on. "His uncles and aunts, his godfathers and godmothers were princes and princesses, or something as grand, and he considers nobody upon earth good enough to associate with himself and Florence. Only to see him loom through the street in winter, in that old worn fur-cloak of his with the scarlet lining, you would think all Worcester belonged to him! The little boys have to turn out into the gutter, for there's not room enough to pass him. Fancy such a man permitting his daughter the hazard of being addressed by any chance provincial! Not he, you may be sure. So he has secured for her one of the family, Bob Erskine."

"Is this true, Bessy?" asked the young man.

"True as Gospel."

"It is strange I never heard Florence allude to it."

"It would be stranger if you had. Young ladies are not in the habit of telling of their matrimonial engagements. I may be engaged, for all you have heard me say: so may Kate; or Georgy either."

"Very true," murmured de Courcy, with more abstraction than Bessy liked to see him exhibit at her latest allusion. "Who is Bob Erskine? Where does he live?"

"Bob's a cousin, I tell you; the head of the Erskine family. He is in the Guards, or the Rifles, or some one of those crack regiments."

"Can it be really so, Bessy?" he continued, still harping upon the theme. "How did you come to know it?"

"From Florence herself. The last time Bob was staying with them, we girls charged her with its being so, and she admitted it. Though perhaps I ought not to have told you—it slipped from me unawares. It must be quite entre nous, mind you, Mr. de Courcy."

"Certainly," nodded the gentleman, unconsciously biting the top of his silver pencil-case into all sorts of forms.

"They are not to be married yet," concluded Bessy. "Captain Erskine considers Florence too young; and Bob—well, Bob's young too."

De Courcy took it all in—like an amiable sea-gull. Open and truth-telling himself, it never occurred to him to suspect people of being otherwise, certainly not a young lady like Elizabeth Juniper. But though Bessy had exaggerated a little, she had grounds for what she said. They had teased Florence about Bob Erskine when he was there, had accused her of being engaged to him; and Florence, after the custom of vain girls, had laughed and simpered, but had not positively denied it.

De Courcy felt miserable, for he had become deeply attached to Florence Erskine, and there grew up a sore feeling in his heart towards her, that she should have fooled him nearly on to tell her so.

Mr. and Mrs. Juniper were totally ignorant of all this flirting and scheming. Had a suspicion of it entered their minds, they would have given the girls a sharp trimming all round.

After this, the young doctor did not go near Florence, and if he heard of her being at Mrs. Juniper's, he kept out of the way. Thus he fell easily into the schemes of the Juniper girls, and flirted with Georgy as much as ever. "Pour faire passer le temps," he said to himself, "rien autre." He often *thought* in French.

One evening, Florence Erskine stood at that open window of her sitting-room; she had thus stood for many, many evenings, watching for one who did not come. Talk about de Courcy's feelings being sore—what were they to her's? Anger, despair, jealousy, and love by turns held possession of her. Oh that she should have suffered herself thus to become attached to a stranger,—to a man despised of her father,—to one who had sought her love only to fling it away in neglect!

Would he ever come again? would those sweet hours, whose very remembrance seemed to renew life and love, ever return? Where was he? What had she done that he should thus desert her? As these thoughts dwelt in her mind, flushing her cheek, chilling her hands, agitating her whole frame, a noise, as of carriage-wheels, was heard, and Florence looked up. The road passed close by the side of the cottage, and the large, handsome four-wheeled chaise of Mr. Juniper came in sight, the surgeon driving, his wife beside him, and Julia and Kate in the back seat. Following, was the surgeon's professional gig, containing de Courcy and Georgiana.

The party bowed and smiled and nodded at Florence, the good-humoured surgeon calling out something her ear did not catch. *He* raised his hat as he looked at her: and, in the space of a minute, all trace of them, save the dust, was gone.

She shut down the window; she leaned her throbbing temples upon her hands; she gave vent to all the fierce jealousy that was raging within her. Never, never, she told herself in her passion, should her thoughts revert to that man again, save with scorn. And yet, the next minute, she caught herself indulging in a fantastic hope that he might come, even that evening, when his drive was over.

But he did not come; and the next night passed, and the next, yet he did not come; and a whole week dragged itself by, and still he did not come. Florence was as one in a fever, tossing about by night and by day, and finding no rest.

One evening she was passing the surgeon's house when Mr. Juniper met her and took her in. They were just going to tea, and the hearty, kindly girls said she must stop. The whole family were present, and de Courcy looked at her keenly. She refused their invitation, but it was of little use: one ran away with her bonnet, another with her gloves: and she sat down.

"What news is stirring, Florence?" asked the surgeon.

"None, that I have heard," she replied. "Papa received a letter from my cousin Robert this morning. You remember him?"

"Quite well."

"He has been exchanging into another regiment, and embarks immediately for India. When he comes home again, he will probably be an old man, he says."

"Has he got a wife yet, dear?" asked Mrs. Juniper, slyly: for she had had her ideas of Florence and her cousin.

"Bob got a wife!" laughed Florence. "Oh, no. He is not likely to take a wife."

"My dear, you speak rather confidently."

"I think I may," replied Florence. "When Bob had to go to Spain last month, papa, in writing, warned him against the attractions of the ladies there, saying he should not like to see him bring home a Spanish wife. Bob answered him that he was the last man in the world to think of any encumbrance of the sort, Spanish or English."

De Courcy looked up, a strange, eager expression on his features. But, just at that moment, Miss Bessy was so awkward as to tilt over the cup of tea she was handing him, and he had to start up and dance, for it scalded his legs.

A servant was desired to attend Florence home that night, but there stood de Courcy in the hall, hat in hand. "Papa wants *you*, Mr. de Courcy," exclaimed Bessy: "he called to you as he went into the surgery." So the young man, with an impatient exclamation on his lips, sought his senior partner; and Florence left with the maid.

But scarcely had she entered her home, when he followed her in: and he stood there before her, his chest heaving, and his words coming from him impetuously.

"What must you have thought of me, Florence, all this while?" he began. "You must either have judged me to be mad, or the most dishonourable man breathing."

She trembled in her surprise and agitation, and felt faint, and could not answer. She certainly had not deemed him mad.

He took her trembling hands in his, he looked earnestly into her changing face, and went on, eagerly:

"Misapprehension has come between us, my love; whether designedly, or not, I cannot say. I see it all now. I was led to believe you were engaged to be married to your cousin—this Bob you have been talking of to-night."

She uttered an exclamation of astonishment. "Oh no, no. There never was anything between us: we did not care for each other in that way. Bob is too poor to marry: that is, too extravagant."

"Yet I, in my credulity, believed it. It has been as a dagger in my heart night and day. For I love you, Florence, with a deep and holy love."

He drew her closer to him,—he whispered words of the most endearing tenderness,—he pressed her sweet face against his. And then they both thought—and said—that nothing should ever part

their hearts again; that they would live together, and for each other, until their years of life had run into the sear and yellow leaf.

But how many others have fondly vowed the same, only to find them hereafter words of vanity and vexation of spirit!

II.

THE PREDICTION.

PRESENTLY we are going to pay a day's visit to Malvern. Not to Malvern as it has been of later years and now is, but as it was nearly a life-time ago. It was a lovely little spot then; romantic, secluded, and beautiful. Not a shop to be seen in it save the cake-shop by the steep, leading down towards the abbey, and the library. No gay place was it in those bygone days, no rendezvous for travellers in smart clothes, eager for pleasure and society; the few visitors seeking it were really invalids, requiring pure air and peace. It was half soothing, half painful, to sit on these beautiful hills, somewhere about St. Ann's Well, and watch the scanty stock of visitors toiling up, one by one. Soothing to recline there, undisturbed, on the green moss, soft as velvet, looking round at that immense extent of landscape, so calm and still, where the only noise to break the quiet would be a distant sheep-bell; painful to gaze at the pale faces of the invalids, supporting themselves up the hill by the help of a stick, and to listen to their troubled breathing as they gained the Well-room, and held the goblet-glass under the spring. I have sat there many a day as a child, finding no occupation but this watching and sympathy: picturing to my curious mind the outward and inward histories of these sick strangers: wondering whence they came, whither they were going next, where they lodged in the village. On some bright day the monotonous scene would be varied. A picnic party from Worcester, all gaiety and laughter and baskets of provisions, would crowd merrily up the hill, and fixing upon a level, convenient spot, encamp themselves and their dishes on it, preferring this free, gipsy mode of enjoying a repast to the confinement and expense of an hotel. Sometimes the day would pass on in almost complete solitude, no parties and no invalids, and then there was nothing to do but sit on the grass and build castles in the air, or to find a fairy-tale book, and be rapt in a child's Elysium.

Oh the retrospect of those early days, our life's morning! when it seems that there is no care or sorrow in the world, or that, if there is, it cannot come near us; when we dream not that existence, the mysterious future so eagerly longed for, can be otherwise than it looks to us in those day-visions, sunny as the charming landscape around, bright as the blue sky above! To recal life as it looked then, with its glorious hopes and expectations, and to dwell on the troubled waters that have come rushing on since, well-nigh overwhelming heart and existence!——Let us hasten on.

Many a merry donkey-party you might see then, toiling up the hills or cantering about the village. We had ours. One of them I especially remember. Twelve or fourteen of us, careless boys and girls together, got the donkeys hired for us, and mounting in the village, just by the Unicorn, cantered off for a ride towards the Link; the old, sober heads of the company bringing up the rear on foot at a sober pace. The turnpike-gate was open, and through it we dashed. But out came the turnpike-man, tearing after us, shouting and screaming. We all reined in, and stopped. What was the matter? Matter indeed! we had gone through the gate without paying. It was certainly true: and what was quite as true, upon searching our pockets, those who had any, there was not a single halfpenny to be found in one of them; what little we had possessed earlier in the day had been spent in "Malvern cakes." In vain we represented to the man that "those behind" were coming up with pockets full of money, and *they* were the paymasters. He preferred being on the safe side, was surly and inexorable; so he made us all dismount, and took off the white cloths of the donkeys. What cared we? we remounted without them, and scampered on down the Link, leaving our astonished old relatives to redeem the pledges. *Old*, we thought them then: we should not think so now. Lodgings at Malvern were within the bounds of a cautious purse then, and there was many an unpretending cottage, picturesque without, clean within, which would let you its best sitting-room, and its bedrooms, for less than a sovereign per week, and give you pleasant looks and civil attendance besides. Go and try them now, these Malvern lodgings. Not that any cottages are left to try: they are transformed into glaring villas and pretentious mansions.

Few places have changed as Malvern has changed. Many a year ago it became the emporium of fashionable society, who flocked to it to try the "Water Cure." Patients wrote their experiences to laud the system; our greatest novelist of that day put forth an account of the marvellous blessings it had wrought on *him*, telling the world it had made him young again. But the romance of the place is gone for ever, and the peace of seclusion it cannot know again.

The day's visit to Malvern was led to by Mrs. Juniper. Summer had come in. Mr. de Courcy and Florence Erskine were cherishing their secret love; while the Juniper girls, perceiving it, made up their minds to accept the inevitable, if it must be, and ceased to fight actively against it. They were good, right-minded girls, after all.

"I don't know whether I should altogether care to have him for my husband, though he is very nice to flirt with," avowed Georgiana.

One hot afternoon the girls wrote a note, inviting Florence to tea; there was a secret they very much wished to impart to her. On the evening previous to this, de Courcy had paid a short visit to Captain Erskine's house. And now as Florence read the note, his impassioned words were still vibrating in her ears.

Of course she went: she would have gone to the end of the earth

for the prospect of meeting *him*. And it was when all were seated at the tea-table that Mrs. Juniper began talking of Malvern.

"Children," she said, "guess what I have been thinking of."

"How should we know, mamma?" asked the young ladies.

"Why that we are perlite people, all of us, to have had Mr. de Courcy so long in our house, and never to have taken him to Malvern."

"We can take him now," said Bessy.

"To be sure," heartily assented her mother. "And you have a great treat in store, as you've never seen it," she added to de Courcy. "How we came to neglect it, I can't make out. Why, the first attention we think of paying to a stranger-friend—anyone from London, perhaps, or from far away on t'other side somewhere—is to take him to Malvern." Mrs. Juniper's geographical knowledge was rather confused, especially on the map of England and Wales.

"Let us make up a picnic," exclaimed Georgiana. "And take our provisions, and dine on the hill."

"With all my heart," said Mrs. Juniper. "You must come with us, Miss Florence."

She looked up eagerly, and caught de Courcy's glance. Oh the rapture of a whole day spent on the Malvern Hills with him!

"When shall it be?" cried Julia Battlebridge. "When would it suit papa? To-morrow, papa?"

"If you like, child. Ask your mamma."

"To-morrow!" echoed Mrs. Juniper, reprovingly; "hadn't you better start to-night? You children have about as much brains as thought—and your papa no more either, in some things. Who is to get up a picnic at an hour's notice? There's the company to be invited, and got together, and there's the eatables. We shall want cold fowls, and tongue, and alimode beef; and some of you perhaps will be calling out for fruit tartlets. How can you have all this if you don't give time to cook and prepare it?"

Mrs. Juniper's remonstrance was unanswerable; so one of the girls dismally proposed the day after.

"That's as bad," corrected Mrs. Juniper. "Nobody goes picnicing on a Saturday."

Finally, Monday was fixed upon. But Florence was wondering whether she could gain her father's consent.

Just at this period, Worcester was indulging surprise at a matter which was not in the common run of events. Some two or three weeks before, a stranger had alighted in the town, had taken a lodging, and had caused it to be circulated in privacy and secrecy that he told fortunes. The surprise arose not from the simple action of his setting-up as a fortune-teller, for that was nothing extraordinary, but in the fact that sundry predictions, spoken by this man to different people, were fulfilled in, to say the least of it, an unaccountable manner. Several of his visitors declared, with their eyes dilating

and their hair standing on end near the bump of marvel, that he had told them things which nobody ever knew, or ever could know, save themselves and Heaven. A scanty few of credulous people went to him at first: what they said sent others, and the man's fame grew. He was called the Wizard, and he was never known in Worcester by any other name. It is no fictitious story that I am relating, though but few people can be left now in Worcester who remember it. The better class of people went to him in secret and would not have confessed to it for the world; some of them went in disguise. The man and his curious power had become an engrossing theme in the town; Mr. Juniper laughingly talked of it, and Mr. Juniper's daughters were wild to test it.

It was this which the girls wanted to confide to Florence: that they had made up their minds, after some qualms of conscience, to consult the Wizard.

Tea over, two of them drew her into their own parlour; Cicely and Kate: and they asked her if she would not like to accompany them.

"Are you all going?" enquired Florence.

"Not at once: the number might betray us, for where's there such a family of grown-up girls as ours?" replied Cicely. "I and Georgy think of going first, and the other three some later night. Won't you come with us?"

"Not I," laughed Florence, "I have no faith. Wizards are clever men, I suppose; this one especially must be; but ——"

"It will be such fun," urged Cicely. "We are dying to go. They say the most extraordinary things of him."

"What if you get found out? If your papa hears of it?"

"How can he hear?" broke in Kate. "We shall take every precaution: wear our shabbiest cotton frocks and garden shawls. The maids are going to lend us muslin caps to put on under our old cottage bonnets, so that we may pass for servant-girls. Why, if papa —or mamma, and she's sharper—were to meet us in the street they could not recognise us."

"I know it will be great fun; and if I thought it would not be found out ——" mused Florence. "When do you go, Cicely?"

"We have fixed on Saturday night; the common people are then occupied, and there will be less chance of our meeting anyone at the Wizard's. Mamma won't miss us; we shall soon be there and back; and the others have promised to stay with her all the time. If she asks anything, they are going to say we are up-stairs, brushing each other's hair. Do come, Florence."

"I don't believe in it," returned the young lady, waveringly.

"Why, they say he will describe one's future husband," exclaimed Cicely, "and so accurately, that if you were not to meet with him for years to come, you could not fail instantly to recognise him."

A quick, burning colour dyed the face of Florence Erskine. If the wise man could indeed do this, she should know whether she was

destined for de Courcy, and her doubts and her fears would be set at rest. And yet, the next moment, she laughed at the absurdity of her thoughts. "Perhaps I will go," she said to Cicely.

"Come in to tea on Saturday evening and we will steal away afterwards. You will not have a better opportunity. And remember, Florence, it is no such weighty matter after all, and if it does no good—if we don't hear anything worthy of belief, I mean—it can do no harm."

"I will go with you; but mind, I have no superstition about me," exclaimed Florence, looking suddenly up. "I never had faith in these things, and never shall have. If I had faith, or any superstition, I should stay away."

Cicely laughed. "That is what everybody says."

"For when I was a child," proceeded Florence, speaking as if she were in a reverie, "a woman who pretended to the gift of reading the future, as this man now pretends, foretold that if ever I should have my 'fate cast,' I should be at the end of my life."

Kate gave a subdued scream. "Then for the love of heaven stay away from him!" she exclaimed.

"Don't be silly, Kate," said Florence, lightly. "Do you believe that such power, pertaining only to the Most High, can be given to mortal man?"

Kate considered. Cicely shook her head. "It may be given for a purpose at times," Cicely said gravely. "We cannot know. Either all these 'Wise Men' are imposters, or none are; understand, I am speaking only of these wonderful soothsayers who are heard of perhaps but once in a century. If this strange man, astrologer, or whatever he may call himself, who has set himself down in Worcester, no one knowing 'whence he cometh, or whither he goeth,' like the wind—if it is given to him to discern and foretell the future, it may have been also given to her, who prophesied, you say, of your fate when you were a child. Do not go, Florence."

"And we are living in enlightened times, and you think it necessary to give me this advice gravely?" exclaimed Florence, her lip curling with scorn. "Oh, Cicely!"

"But if you are so mockingly incredulous, why go at all?" persisted Cicely. "You will not believe anything he may tell you."

"Surely you do not suppose I go to have *my* fortune told?" retorted Miss Erskine. "Nonsense, Cicely! If I go at all, it will be for the fun of the thing; and to hear how far your credulity will allow him to dupe you and Georgiana."

Cicely looked at her. "I don't think you are quite so sceptical as you wish to make out, Florence."

"Indeed I am."

On the following day, Friday, Florence proffered the request to her father—that she might be allowed to accompany the party to Malvern. It is eight miles from Worcester by road. Captain Erskine

chanced to be in a good humour, with himself and everybody about him, for Mr. Stanton had distinctly intimated to him that he was substantially remembered in his will, and the Captain foresaw an end to his pinching poverty. So he hesitated in his reply: had it not been for his exuberance of spirits he would have denied her at once.

"Who is going?" he enquired.

"Mrs. Juniper and the young ladies," replied Florence, not daring to intimate that any strangers were to be invited. "Mr. Juniper will ride over in the afternoon, if he has time."

"Juniper's carriage will not hold them all," cried Gentleman Erskine. "And who's to drive it?"

"The groom will drive, I suppose; and they are going to have a post-carriage from the Crown," answered Florence. "It is two years since I went to Malvern, papa."

"But the going with these Junipers, Florence! I don't like that."

"I do not know anyone else to go with," she timidly observed.

"Well, Florence," he reluctantly conceded, "for this once you may join them. But I do insist upon it that afterwards you set yourself resolutely to break up by degrees the intimacy. The girls may be pleasant and sociable, and all that, but they are beneath you. I am going out myself for a few hours on Monday," he concluded, pompously.

Gentleman Erskine was going fishing. It was an amusement he delighted in. Sometimes he would be seen with his rod and basket, bearing off towards the Wear, at Powick; sometimes in the direction of Bransford; sometimes in a totally opposite route. And there, arrived at the stream, he would sit with exemplary patience for hours, in breathless silence, staring at the float, his line in the water, a worm at one end and a—what is it?—at the other, waiting for the fish to bite; his brain filled all the time with the greatness of the grandeur of all the Erskines.

It was getting towards sunset on Saturday evening, when three figures, attired in cotton dresses, faded shawls, and plain straw bonnets with huge muslin borders underneath them, in short, looking like decent servant-girls, stole out of Surgeon Juniper's house, and walked quickly along the street, turning their heads from the gaze of the passers-by. The young ladies would fain have waited for twilight, but had not dared to make it so late. Fortune seemed to have favoured them, for an old friend of Mrs. Juniper's had dropped in to spend the evening with her, and she never gave a thought to what the girls might be about; whilst Mr. Juniper and de Courcy were gone to some famous medical lecture that was being given that evening in the town.

They bent their steps in the direction of Lowesmoor, in an obscure part of which neighbourhood sojourned the Wizard.

"There's the house," exclaimed Cicely in a whisper, pointing to

one of four low ones in a row, with green shutters and narrow doorways. "I and Julia were walking by it with papa last Sunday, and he laughingly showed it to us: little thinking we should ever make use of his information."

As Cicely spoke, they halted before the door, hesitating and deliberating, half fearful, now it was so near, of going on with the adventure.

"You knock, Georgy," continued Cicely.

"Knock yourself," retorted Georgy. "You have the use of your hands."

"Shall we go back?" asked Florence, some impulse prompting her.

"Why, if we go back," argued Cicely, "they will laugh at us so dreadfully. Unless we say he had such a lot of people with him he could not see us. Are you afraid?"

"I afraid," retorted Florence, disdainfully. "But we had better do one thing or the other, for we may attract attention standing here."

"Oh courage, courage," exclaimed Georgiana, giving a smart rap at the door: "don't let us have to say we took all this trouble about the caps and things for nothing." And, before they had time to draw back, which perhaps they would have done, after all, a boy opened the door and showed them into the presence of the Wizard.

He looked as little like a wizard, that is, like their ideas of one, as he could well look. A thin old gentleman of sixty, dressed in black with a white cravat, leaning back comfortably in an arm-chair: they might have taken him for one of the minor canons sitting at his ease after dinner. The room had nothing in it but chairs, tables, a carpet, the usual ordinary furniture: of all apparatus generally supposed to belong to the exercise of the black art, the place was void.

"Is it the wrong house?" whispered Georgiana to her sister.

"No, it is the right house," said the master, answering her thoughts, for her speech, they truly believed, he could not have heard. "Which of you shall I speak with first? Let the others take a seat."

He motioned towards a row of chairs that stood against the wall at the end of the room. The girls did not take the hint; all three of them clustered round the table, on which stood a curiously-constructed lamp, not known in those days, but common enough now. It gave a great light, and Georgiana, shrinking from its glare, pushed, almost imperceptibly, her sister towards the soothsayer. He resumed his seat, and looked at them, one by one.

"Why did you come to me in disguise?" he asked: "with me it avails not. Take off those clumsy gloves," he continued to Cicely; "you have adopted them that your lady-hands may be hidden from me: but until I have examined those hands, I cannot answer you a single question, or tell aught that you seek to know."

She removed obediently the old beaver gloves, almost reverently, as if she were in the presence of a master-spirit—perhaps she thought she *was*. Before looking at her hands, he took out of a drawer a pack of cards, giving them to her to shuffle and cut, and he then placed them, one by one, their faces upwards, upon the table. They were singular looking; not playing cards at all; each card presented a different and intricate picture, and was inscribed with some curious Egyptian names.

Cicely waited, her hands stretched out to display their palms. Now the wizard would carefully examine the hands, a microscope to his eye; now, without the microscope, he would study the cards on the table. Presently he laid the glass down, and looked in Cicely's face. The other two stood in silence, amusement displayed on the countenance of Florence Erskine.

"You need not have troubled yourself to come here," he began abruptly, addressing Cicely, "for I can tell you little more than you already know."

"What do you mean?" she stammered, involuntarily: and he resumed.

"Your course will be marked with no event of sufficient moment to be set forth here: neither of joy nor sorrow. As a ship sails calmly along a smooth sea, so will you pass peacefully down the stream of your maiden life, until its race shall be run."

"But who will be my husband?" enquired the eager Cicely.

"You will never marry," he returned.

"Never marry!" echoed the girl.

"No. You had a chance once, and you threw it away. You will not have another."

Georgiana stared in amazement at the joke of Cicely's having received an offer, and *rejected* it. But look at Cicely—at her glowing colour: that alone will tell you his words are true. The assistant-surgeon, designated by her sisters as the elephant, the monkey in spectacles, had made Cicely an offer in secret, and she refused it.

"And be thankful that your life is destined to be so uneventful," continued the speaker to her. "There are two paths in this world; one is of peace—and a very small one it is, but little frequented; the other is full of thorns. To few people indeed is it given to tread the former; but you are one of them."

The dismayed and angry Cicely felt her face grow hot and cold by turns, as she listened to this most unwelcome prediction; and she only awoke from her astonishment, to hear the man address her sister. Georgiana had removed her gloves at his desire, touched the cards as Cicely did, and waited. Florence had drawn nearer, and she saw, what she had never noticed before, that the inside of Georgiana's hands, even to the ends of the fingers, were completely covered with lines; small lines, crossed, and re-crossed again. The old man sat looking at them with his glass to his eye.

"Your fate in life will be widely different from your sister's," he said at length, "for you will meet with, and endure, more cares than I should choose to tell you of."

"And not be married either, perhaps!" burst forth the indignant Cicely.

"You will be married in God's own good time," he continued to Georgiana, taking no heed of Cicely. "And though your life will be full of cares, as I now predict, there is no cause for you to be dismayed, for it will not be without its compensations. Your home will lie in a foreign land, one washed by the troubled waters of the Pacific Ocean. *He* is there now; and you will not see him yet: not for years."

"Not there *now?*" exclaimed Georgiana, surprised out of the remark.

"May be your thoughts are running upon one nearer and dearer," he rejoined: "but neither of you"—and he looked alternately at Georgiana and Florence—"will marry *him;* so let there be no more bitter feeling between you. You have wasted by far too much on these dreams already; dreams that for both of you will come to nought. The wife destined for *him* is as yet a child, sporting in her mother's home: neither of you will ever be more to him than you are now."

Georgiana, in her surprise, could not find ready words of answer. Florence was indignant.

"You are mistaking your vocation, sir," she haughtily exclaimed. "I did not come here to have my fortune told."

"I will not tell it, young lady," he quietly replied. "Nevertheless, I should like to be allowed to take a closer look at your hands. Their marks strike me as being peculiar."

Florence's hands were lying open on the table; she had taken off the large, uncomfortable gloves assumed for disguise. Making no objection, she moved them nearer to him in scornful compliance; perhaps in curiosity. The Wizard examined them long and attentively, glancing aside at the cards from time to time in silence.

"I did not come to you for advice or remark of any kind," repeated Florence, when he looked up.

"So you have informed me: and I know that all I might say would be worse than despised. Yet, if you would listen to me, I could save you even now."

"Save me from what?"

"Nay, why question me? Have you not warned me that you wish to hear nothing?"

"I wish to hear this," she answered, her tone of scorn growing deeper. "Tell it me, I beg of you."

"It will make no difference whether I do or not," remarked the man, as if speaking to himself. "From the fate which is threatening

you: and which appears"—bending again over her hands—"to be drawing very close now ——"

"Pray what is the fate?" she interrupted.

"I cannot say. I do not know."

Florence laughed a derisive laugh. "Oh, thank you: that is quite sufficient. You would warn me to avoid some fate or other, but you don't know what! Thank you, sir, once again, for your valuable advice. I have already said I did not come to seek it." She made him a half-mocking curtsey, and turned to her companions, saying that as their business was over, it was time to be going. The young ladies turned to leave, and the Wizard rose.

"To you who did come to seek it, I have no more to add," he said. "Your life," looking at Cicely, "will be one of uneventful calm, bearing for you no great pleasures and no great pains. And yours," turning to Georgiana, "will be one scene of cares and crosses from the day you relinquish your father's name; and his for which you will exchange it, is to you as yet that of a stranger: but do not forget that the life will bring to you its compensations. There is nothing more; so go back quickly, all of you, to whence you came."

The two sisters laid, each, a heavy piece of silver on the table, as they turned to depart. Florence laid nothing. She was about to follow them, when the old man placed his hand upon her shoulder, his strange, deep-set eyes riveting their gaze on hers.

"You have good seed in your heart," he said earnestly, "and your faults are but those of youth and thoughtlessness: I will not have it on my conscience that I suffered you to pass this threshold without a warning, unavailing though it will be. For the next three or four days, say until Monday—or—perhaps—Tuesday—say until Tuesday shall have glided into the womb of the past, keep strictly the Commandments; break not one either in the spirit or the letter: and then years of happiness may yet be yours."

"And if I do not?" asked Florence.

"I have told you that you will not. In less than the time I have mentioned to you, you will, I fear, have gone whither we are all hastening."

"If danger threatens me," she persisted, "why not tell me its nature, that I may avoid it?"

"In asking the question, you are but mocking still," he sadly said, "but I will answer it. That some great danger threatens to overtake you, is certain; its precise nature I know not: such close knowledge is not given us. But it seems to me that it will arise out of some fault of your own—I think, self-willed disobedience. Now go: I have fulfilled my duty."

He resumed his chair as he spoke, and the three girls turned and were gone.

"Of all canting, story-telling impostors," broke out Cicely, before

they were well in the street, being unable longer to control her exasperation, "that wicked old animal beats all."

Cicely truly believed so. For he had said she would never be married: and if all the wise men breathing had sworn to that, she would not have given credit to it.

"You don't believe in him, then?" said Georgiana, whose spirits seemed rather subdued by the visit.

"Believe in him!" retorted Cicely. "I would give a thousand pounds, if I had it, to be Mayor of Worcester for one day, just to have him put in the stocks. The wretched old idiot!"

Florence Erskine remained silent, her reflections full of uneasiness and perplexity. She had maintained during the visit a mood of contempt and disbelief: to say that she came away in such would be wrong. The extraordinary power with which that man, wizard or no wizard, divined her and Georgiana's most secret feelings, puzzled her: their jealousy of each other, which she had believed could be known to none; the positive assertion that neither of them would marry de Courcy; with the solemn prediction that in a space of time which might be counted by hours, some untoward fate threatened to overtake her, *he* evidently pointed to death! Mixed with these thoughts, came recurring the remembrance of that tale of her childhood—that should she ever have her fortune told, she would be at the end of her life: this man had now said she was at the end of it.

"I told you," she laughed, but the laugh sounded bitterly hollow in her companions' ears—"I told you what you would meet with, Cicely: you will believe in fortune-tellers now! And he—he—that daring charlatan, presumed to warn ME against breaking the Commandments!"

Wrapping their shawls round them, and drawing their bonnets over their faces, they hastened through the now lighted streets, and gained their home and got in undiscovered.

Sunday was the next day. In the afternoon Captain Erskine went as usual to visit his relative, and Florence afterwards took her way to Mrs Juniper's, the girls having invited her. The disagreeable impression left by the Wizard's words had faded away; reason had reasserted its power, and Florence was herself again. The surgeon's family usually attended church on Sunday evenings, but this night two or three of the girls got themselves excused on the score of the heat, and stayed at home to chatter. When Florence made ready to go home, a servant was waiting to see her thither; but de Courcy, coming in at the moment, told the maid her services were not required, and went with Florence himself.

They walked away towards her home, in the sultry, overpowering air, their pace so slow as to be scarcely perceptible, she listening to his honeyed words. Ah! she thought not now of the old Wizard and his predictions; when with *him*, the fulness of her happiness was all in all. And thus conversing with each other, they

neared the cottage. No other dwellings were near to it, no prying eyes could be on view, and de Courcy drew Florence's arm within his, little conscious, either of them, that the worst eyes of all were looking on.

At the window of his small drawing-room stood Captain Erskine. He had come home betimes to make certain preparations connected with his fishing-tackle and bait for the morning's excursion. In the midst of which, happening to look towards the road, he saw his daughter sauntering up the hill, comfortably leaning on the arm of ——

Of whom? The Captain applied his double eye-glass to his eye, wiped it, turned it, and tried it again. Why—good saints protect himself and his outraged ancestors!—it *was* that connexion of Juniper's! They have got to the little gate now, and Florence's hand is held in his as he leads her through it: and Gentleman Erskine's grizzled hair raises itself on end with horror, and his gaze glares on his insulted pedigree, hanging opposite, and he brings his indignant face in close contact with the window-panes.

Florence saw him; and, turning sick with apprehension, wished de Courcy a hasty good night, and went in.

Captain Erskine was by no means a meek man, but never had Florence seen him give way to passion so violent. A half-doubt of the truth flashed across his brain. Florence he knew was beautiful; while this fellow, he half acknowledged to himself, was what women and fools might call attractive. But the doubt was dismissed at once: for Gentleman Erskine's exclusive mind could no more bring itself to suspect Florence capable of an attachment for a man in the position of de Courcy, than for the begrimed official who periodically went up his chimneys: and indeed the ropes on which he himself stood were so exalted, that he could see little difference in the position of the two, the dispenser of medicines and the ramoneur. Oh, terrible disgrace!—she had walked with this man (as he supposed) through the open streets! Worcester had seen her leaning upon the arm of an apothecary, that obscure emigré, who had never known his grandfather! How could this stain be wiped out?

As a preliminary step, when his rage had somewhat expended itself, Captain Erskine forbade his daughter, in the most positive terms man could use, to join the party to Malvern on the morrow. She shivered, she cried, she pleaded for a retraction of his prohibition: all in vain. She might with as much effect have set on and petitioned Jupiter.

"What shall I say," she sobbed. "I told them you consented, and they expect me. What excuse can I offer now?"

"Excuse to them!" he cried, indignantly, "the obligation is on the other side. Make none. Or say it is my pleasure, if you choose: but, go you do not."

"Oh papa!"

"How dare you oppose your will to mine, even in thought?" he demanded. "Are you out of your mind? I forbid you to think or to speak again about their scampering Malvern party. I would rather lock you up, Florence, than suffer you to join it. Disobey me if you dare."

When Florence rose the next morning, her head aching and her eyes heavy, she found a brief, stern note left for her by her father, who had departed on the fishing excursion. It reiterated his prohibition of the previous night; once more enjoining her not to disobey him. She wrote a line to Mrs. Juniper, saying she was unable to accompany them, and sent it. In answer to it came Mr. de Courcy, requiring, in Mrs. Juniper's name, to know the why and the wherefore. Florence simply said her father wished her not to go; but of his positive prohibition and his violence she did not like to tell. De Courcy supposed Captain Erskine's objection might be put down to the score of the heat, which was excessive. He treated the prohibition lightly. Persuasion is wondrously effective when uttered by loved lips, and Florence wavered. She made a compromise with her conscience, and assuring *it* that no persuasion should induce her to disobey her father by going to Malvern, she yet consented to accompany de Courcy to Mrs. Juniper's, to tell them in person that she could not go.

It was then ten o'clock, the hour fixed for starting. The party of invited friends were assembling, all eager and joyous, the carriages waited at the door, and Florence was tempted on all sides: her scruples were assailed, her somewhat confused accounts of her father's "wishes" laughed at.

"The heat!" exclaimed Mrs. Juniper, catching up de Courcy's notion. "Well, it's bad enough to-day, child, goodness knows; but it won't melt you."

Mrs. Juniper added some convincing arguments, their matter sensible enough, the girls said go she should and must, de Courcy whispered a passionate entreaty, while the good-natured surgeon declared he would bear all the blame, and appease Captain Erskine. And Florence, overpowered by their persuasions and her own yearnings, at length yielded, her conscience pricking her, and her better judgment fighting a fierce pitched battle.

It was half-past ten when they started, eighteen or twenty of them, a goodly cavalcade. Two post-carriages from the Crown in Broad Street, and the surgeon's chaise, de Courcy driving the latter.

"You will go with *me*, Florence," he had said to her, as they all stood on the threshold of the door. But, even as he spoke, Georgiana Juniper mounted, without assistance, into the front seat of her father's carriage; and Mr. Juniper, coming up, took Florence's hand, and placed her in one of the large ones by the side of his wife.

The post-boys started. Down Broad Street, over the bridge, increasing their speed as they bowled along the open road leading to

St. John's, and lessening it as they came to the houses. St. John's passed, they drove through the turnpike-gate, and were fairly on the road to Malvern in all the heat. None could remember such heat as hung that day over the Faithful City.

Mrs. Juniper complained piteously. "What's my face like?" she suddenly asked. "Is it crimson?"

"I never saw any crimson so red, mamma," answered Julia, turning round from the box, where she was seated with young Mr. Parker, who was reading for the Church, there being a living in his family, to look at Mrs. Juniper's face. He had just come down from Oxford, after being plucked in his Little Go.

"What a mercy it is that we thought of bringing that bottled perry!" continued Mrs. Juniper. "As to the ale and wine, I don't think we ought to touch it till the sun's gone down, unless we'd like to be laid up with brain fever. I never felt such a day as this."

"Nor anyone else in this country, ma'am," observed young Mr. Parker. "It is said, that strange old wizard has predicted this day will be a memorable one. I think he is about right for once."

Julia Battlebridge turned again and glanced at Florence with a meaning look. Florence sat silent and pale. She did not absolutely fear the words the strange man had said to her; she did not positively fear that old prediction of her childhood; and yet both kept floating in her brain, mingling with the thoughts of her own disobedience, and what would be the anger of her father. That strange injunction of the wizard's, bidding her not break any of the commandments, had come back to her with vivid vehemence. She had listened in resentment to the unnecessary warning, haughty pride buoying up her own self-sufficiency — she, Florence Erskine, break a Commandment! Yet, not thirty-six hours had elapsed before she had fallen into the snare and the sin: she had broken the one which says, Thou shalt honour thy father and thy mother.

Wick was passed, and then the old and most dangerous bridge at Powick, and, passing the turnpike-gate, the horses bore up the ascent, turning off opposite the Lion. Soon the windings of the road brought the towering hills in view, with their various hues, blue, brown, green, and golden; and de Courcy saw that his pretty white sea-shells were indeed houses. Away cantered the postboys, on to Newland Common, its geese as plentiful as ever, leaving on their left the turning to Madresfield, Lord Beauchamp's seat. The Swan, with its swinging sign-board, passed on the right, the horses began their slow pace up the Link, noted for its upsets, and the party reached the village of Great Malvern at last.

They drove to the Crown, and alighted. The carriages were to be left there. Mrs. Juniper was shown to the pleasantest sitting-room with the lovely view, ordered a plate of sandwiches for those who wished to partake of any, and said the party would return

for tea at six o'clock in the evening. It was a programme often carried out: luncheon on the hills; tea at the Crown or the Bellevue.

Meanwhile the hampers of provisions—Mrs. Juniper's fowls and tartlets and à-la-mode beef were taken from the carriages, now surrounded by a shoal of donkeys, with their drivers; sunburnt women, boys, and girls.

"Are we to ride or walk up?"

"Who asked the question on such a day as this?" cried young Mr. Parker, looking down from the balcony. "Mrs. Juniper shall have that one," pointing to a large strong grey donkey. "And, I say, my good donkey-women, give an eye to your saddles: they have a habit of turning, you know."

Mr. de Courcy chose to walk; not a very wise determination, as Mrs. Juniper told him, with the thermometer at its present height. *She* did not know that the heat and the toilsome climb were to him as nothing, whilst he could thus keep by the side of Florence Erskine. And so they commenced their ascent of the hill, towards St. Ann's Well, and Mrs. Juniper sincerely wished there was a carriage way to it, that she might avoid the zig-zag path of the jolting donkey. In later years one was made.

They took de Courcy to an elevated spot, and then made him turn suddenly to look at the glorious beauty of the scene. The amazing expanse of prospect extending out around; the peaceful plains, lying broad and distinct; the blending together of wood and dale; the striking contrast of the green fields with the golden hue of the ripening corn; Bredon Hill there, the Old Hills here, hills everywhere; the few mansions scattered about with a sparing hand, giving life to the landscape: and Worcester, fair to view, lying near, with its fine old cathedral and St. Andrew's tapering spire.

"Yes, it is very beautiful," sighed de Courcy, drawing a deep breath of reverence as he lifted his hat. "Great indeed are the glories of God's marvellous works!"

Mrs. Juniper's voice brought him back to common life. "If you'll believe me, them silly apes are going on to the top!"

Turning from his somewhat prolonged reverie, de Courcy saw that the younger members of the party were continuing their way up the hill: the elder ones had dismissed their donkeys and were gathered in and about St. Ann's Well.

"Have you lost your wits, you young people?" screamed out Mrs. Juniper again.

"No, mamma," replied Bessy, looking round. "Why?"

"If you ride to the top in this heat, you'll be half-dead."

"Oh we don't care for that. We shall be back for dinner."

Mrs. Juniper sat down inside the room at the Well. Some of the more active ones began to unpack the hampers. One gentleman, an old Worcester lawyer, who was rather puffy, threw himself flat on the

grass, wishing he could get a breath of air. In vain: the atmosphere was still as death.

"Decidedly those young ones will be broiled," he remarked.

"Why, here they are, back already!" exclaimed Mr. Parker's mother, as she caught sight of the white cloths of the donkeys, slowly winding round from the heights above. "We shall see how they feel after their broiling."

"I have heard tell of women in Ingee," remarked Mrs. Juniper, extending her head outside to get a view of the broiled, "who have voluntary sat right down in a huge fire to be roasted alive. I'd not say that there can lie much choice between that and the going up the hill to-day, as them geese were doing; especially if 'twas a-foot, like Mr. de Courcy."

"It was impossible to endure it," called out Cicely, in explanation. "I believe, if we had gone on, we should have felt fit to drop, as mamma said, and the poor animals too. So that's why we are back again."

Heavy and listlessly passed the time, in the unbearable heat, till they sat down to dinner, and sincerely did they wish their excursion had been deferred to a more propitious day. But young and healthy people cannot be still long; and some of them, when dinner was over, began to wander up the hill again. The heat was really dreadful, not perhaps quite so burning as it had been in the morning, for the blazing sun had gone in, but the oppressive, sultry sensation had increased. It seemed as if they could scarcely draw their breath; and ominous clouds of copper colour were gathering in the sky. Unheeding the weather, and regardless of fatigue, de Courcy and Florence, side by side, at length reached the top of the hill: their companions had dropped off one by one, and they were alone. There they stood some time, that he might admire the vale of Herefordshire; a fine prospect also, but not like the magnificent one on the other side. And then, turning to the left, they continued their way on the hill's summit, and gained the little round building, scarcely larger or higher than a good-sized watch-box, known as Lady Harcourt's Tower.

Here they entered and sat down; and de Courcy, drawing her to his side, whispered once more his words of love. Eloquent words they were, more eloquent than they need have been, for where love reigns in a heart, as it did in hers, eloquence is needed not: and she, lost in the perfect rapture of the moment, put her compunctions of conscience aside. She forgot her disobedience; she forgot the certain refusal of her father to sanction the future; she braved the thought of his anger, and promised to be the wife of Louis de Courcy.

A flash of lightning startled them; and, as they rushed outside the tower, a long, loud, frightful echo told that the storm had begun. Never, perhaps, has a storm come on with more rapid violence: the clouds had gathered together, black, lurid, angry, the forked lightning

playing amongst them ; the thunder reverberated in the hollows of the hills ; and the atmosphere appeared as if tainted with death, it was so still and terrible.

"We must make the best of our way down, Florence," hastily cried de Courcy.

But there came, flying on to the top of the hill, five or six of their party. The lawyer before mentioned and his daughter, two of the Juniper girls, and a lad of fifteen and his sister. They had been close to the top when the thunder commenced its roaring, and were running along now, to take shelter in Lady Harcourt's Tower.

"I do not like it," interposed de Courcy, as they were about to enter. "We shall be safer going down the hill than there."

"Not at all," dissented the lawyer, who was puffing with his recent exertion. "I remember, when a boy, a party of us being overtaken in this very spot by a most violent thunderstorm. We shut ourselves in here, there was a door to the place then, and were quite safe and comfortable ; whilst in the valley below there were two cows and a milkmaid killed."

Still de Courcy did not like it ; but not one was willing to descend the hill with him and brave the fury of the storm, preferring the shelter of Lady Harcourt's Tower. Their situation was appalling enough. Perched on the summit of one of the highest of the Malvern hills, the valley beneath them appeared as if it were miles away, and they planted in the air, on that narrow ledge between the earth and the sky, amidst all the roar and battle of the elements.

The storm increased in violence ; peal succeeded flash, and flash succeeded peal without an instant's cessation ; the heavens were in a blaze of light from one extremity to the other, and a noise, as of a thousand cannons, seemed bursting close overhead. The poor girls were fearfully terrified. De Courcy tried to reassure them, but could not succeed : a scream from one, a shriek from another ; tears and sobs ; exclamations, that the lightning blinded and the thunder deafened them, were mixed with murmured prayers and dread whispers that they should never get down again alive. Florence was quiet, betraying less terror than the rest. Why was it ? Because she was by the side of *him*, her lover ; and so all-absorbing to her was the consciousness of her love for him, that other emotions, and even the dread of danger, were partially lost in it : his protection seemed to be all-sufficient for security, as it was for happiness. De Courcy had thrown his arm round her and drawn her to his side, where she quietly stood, her face hidden against him, and her heart beating with its sense of bliss. Cicely Juniper he had drawn to him on the other side.

"There !" he exclaimed, pointing to a distant part of the heavens. It was a small ball of fire, darting down to the earth. The sight was but momentary : before the others could look, it was gone.

"I must say I wish we were safe down," exclaimed the old lawyer. "I wonder how Mrs. Juniper and the rest feel at the Well ?"

Before the words had well passed his lips, there came a vivid flash, a terrific peal, and a scream from Cicely Juniper, who declared the tower was shaking. It may have been her fancy, or it may have been that the tower did shake with a shock of electricity, the others felt nothing; but Florence Erskine had fallen on the ground at de Courcy's side. There was no perceptible change in her countenance, except that it was white and still.

"She has fainted!" exclaimed the lawyer, stooping, and pulling at her hand.

"It is the faintness of DEATH!" shuddered de Courcy, bending down his ashy face. "I fear, I fear it is death." He raised Florence in his arms, as he spoke; he called her by every endearing name, unmindful now of the ears of those around; he pressed his white cheeks to hers, vainly hoping to feel signs of breath and life. But there was no further life for Florence Erskine in this world, for she had indeed been struck and killed by lightning. And when the wailing and terror-stricken party returned that night to Worcester, carrying the dreadful tidings with them to Captain Erskine, the ill-fated young lady, cold and dead, had to be left at Malvern.

It had, in truth, been a remarkable and fatal day, as the strange man, the Wizard, had foretold. On the following morning, Cicely, in her horror and perplexity, disclosed to Mr. Juniper the particulars of their visit to this man, with his prediction regarding Florence, and the surgeon went to Lowesmoor at once to seek him out. But he had disappeared; he was gone, none knew exactly when, certainly not whither; he had left the city.

Mr. Juniper plied the landlady of the house with questions. She said that on the Sunday evening he had called her to his presence, paid her what little claims she had against him, with something over, and told her he should probably leave on the morrow. On the Monday morning while he was at breakfast she went up-stairs to make his bed, and there she saw his little black portmanteau ready packed. But she did not see him leave the house, or know at what hour he really went.

Mr. Juniper could discover no more than that. Yet he would have liked to: he would have liked to put a few questions to the man, for he felt intensely puzzled by him. He had his reasons. This Wizard, or whatever he was or might call himself, had betrayed a knowledge of things, which, it seemed impossible (unless by more than human inspiration) he could have known or learnt in any way. One instance shall be given.

At a short distance from Worcester there lived two small respectable farmers, related to one another and occupying adjoining farms. On the Saturday morning, the same day on which, later, the Juniper girls paid their visit to the Wizard, a daughter of each of these farmers walked into Worcester as usual to keep market: their baskets of cream-cheese, poultry, eggs, and butter being conveyed

thither by a man on horseback. They wrangled as they walked: Phillis D. had brought her little sister with her, which displeased Esther J. "It's not my fault," pleaded Phillis, defending herself warmly: "When I came downstairs from putting my things on, there was Sally all ready in her bonnet and tippet, and mother said she was coming with me. How could I help bringing her, I'd like to know? I did try; I said the walk would be too much for her this hot weather; but mother answered me shortly that the child was looking puny, and it would do her good."

"All the same, you should have somehow contrived not to bring her just to-day," retorted Esther.

For these two young women were intending to get their fortunes told. Having heard the marvellous things said of the Wizard, they wished to benefit by his divinations as well as other people did, and perhaps get promised a husband apiece in some flourishing young farmer. The visit had been planned for the previous Saturday, but a matter prevented its being carried out; so they meant to pay it to-day without fail: if it were put off yet to another week, the Wizard might have left Worcester. Of course Sally's presence was a tremendous drawback, but they must make the best of it.

By dint of selling their excellent wares cheaper than usual, they were at liberty before one o'clock and bent their steps from the market-house down to Lowesmoor: promising Sally dire punishment for all time to come if she ever breathed a word of what she was about to see and hear. But these warnings, administered in going through Silver Street, produced an effect which they had not calculated upon. The child was seized with intense terror. She had heard of the Wizard, and entertained a most unreasoning fear of him, fully believing he would eat her up at sight, as the wolf ate up Red Riding Hood. Sally was a pretty little girl of ten years old, constitutionally timid, and she burst into a fit of sobs and cries. The young women shook her and slapped her. Finding that did little good, they presently, after turning out of Silver Street, bought her some ginger-bread nuts and bulls-eyes—which in a degree soothed the tears, if not the fear.

The Wizard was alone when they entered. While he proceeded to tell the fortunes of the elder girls, the little one was put to sit on one of the chairs at the end of the room: but she wept aloud, and trembled from head to foot Once it seemed to distract the Wizard: he paused in what he was saying, and looked round.

"Who is the child? What is she crying for?"

"She is my sister, sir, and she was afraid to come here," answered Phillis D. "Sally, you naughty girl, hush your sobs directly. Who do you suppose is going to harm you?"

"There is nothing here to harm you, my child," spoke the wise man, gently. "Don't be afraid."

This address seemed to have quite an opposite effect from the

kindly one intended. Sally, after a moment's silence from dumb terror, went on sobbing worse than before.

At the close of the interview, when the young women were departing well satisfied, for they had each been promised fairly good luck in life as well as a husband, the Wizard rose and put his hand upon Sally's shoulder.

"Cry on, my child, for you have good cause to," he said to her with sad impressiveness. "You will reach home to find you have lost the best friend you ever had in life."

They took their journey homewards, the young women by far too much engrossed by their own future to pay heed to the wise man's parting words to the child, or speculate upon what they could mean. Sally was promised a new doll if she held her tongue.

Esther J.'s gate was the first reached, and she passed through it. Phillis and Sally D. went on to their own house : which they found full of distress and confusion. Their father was dead. Farmer D. had dropped down that morning in a fit of apoplexy. Poor little Sally had indeed lost her best friend in life—her father.

Now the reader must make the best and the worst that he can of this. It is strictly true.

Mr. Juniper did not know what to make of it. He was at the farm when the daughters got in, having been the medical man sent for : and Phillis, beside herself with excitement and grief, repeated to him what the Wizard had said to the child. Mr. Juniper considered it strange. It might of course have been but a saying at hazard, curiously fulfilled. The only other solution he could think of was—that the Wizard must in some way (there had been time) have heard of Mr. D.'s death : yet it seemed unlikely. Some other unaccountable sayings of the man had previously become known to Mr. Juniper, and he determined to pay him a visit the following week. But, as already stated, he went too late; the man was gone.

Louis de Courcy never flirted with Georgy Juniper again; from that hour he was a wiser and a graver man. The death of the ill-fated Florence took effect upon them all, and henceforward the girls were less careless, more staid and sober. Georgiana married in the course of years, and went over seas with her husband; and poor Cicely's wedding never came at all. Her sisters, one after another, quitted the parent home; but she was left. And in later years Cicely grew to think her own life was the happiest, for it was free from care.

Never again was the Wizard heard of in Worcester. Whence he had derived his information, that spirit of divination which he really appeared to possess, none could, or did, pretend to speculate—for indeed this record of him has been no fancy sketch. Those who were living at the time, witnesses to the stir he caused, are dead and gone; and few of a later generation remain yet in Worcester to retain remembrance of the Chronicle.

"Floreat Semper Fidelis Civitas."

THE HOMES OF THE PRINCESS LOUISE IN CANADA.

By Mrs. Clark Murray.

The Citadel: Residence of Princess Louise and the Marquis of Lorne in Quebec.

THE proposal that a Princess of the House of England should make her residence in a British Colony for a term of five years was received by the Canadian world with some little surprise, which amounted to actual incredulity among the inhabitants of the colony itself. But as the proposal shaped itself into purpose, and the purpose into preparation, enthusiasm took the place of doubt, and all Canada became astir with anticipation of the unprecedented honour. Had the auspicious event taken place during the summer months, it is probable that Her Royal Highness would have sailed up the Gulf of the magnificent St. Lawrence, with pine odours from the far-stretching forests floating on the breeze, and the unpretentious but picturesque cottages of the French farmers dotting the shores of the river. Arriving later in the season than navigation is considered safe in these waters, the steamship *Sarmatian* made for Halifax Harbour, and the Princess first set foot on Canadian soil in the most ancient English settlement of the Dominion, with her august husband, the Marquis of Lorne, the newly-appointed governor.

The place was originally called Chebucto, a name still preserved as that of a promontory in the neighbourhood, but was afterwards named Halifax, in honour of a nobleman who accompanied a band of adventurous settlers under the Hon. Edward Cornwallis on his mission as Governor-in-Chief, 1749. It has now grown to the capital of Nova Scotia, the modern Acadia, and occupies a most commanding site, overlooking one of the finest harbours in the world, with anchorage

enough for the entire British navy. It is decorated by public gardens, ponds and fountains, and surrounded by pretty walks and drives.

The whole province enjoys a most healthful and invigorating climate; with less of the extreme heat, which, though rendering some of the sister provinces of the Dominion more desirable for agriculture, deprives them of much charm of residence.

The principal industries of the people are among their wealth of forest, and mine, and sea. Coal has been worked for over a hundred years, and indeed Nova Scotia is the only part of Canada where this commodity has been found, at least in available quantities, and close enough to other minerals to make these of any value. The

Rideau Hall the Residence of the Princess in the Capital.

gold mines are mainly in the vicinity of Halifax; a bar from one of these, recently brought to that city, weighing 800 ounces, at a value of 16,000 dollars. But the fisher-folk have made Evangeline's country more famous than its miners have done, and bring annually to market an enormous wealth from the treasures of the deep in codfish, mackerel, herring, haddock, lobster, and various kinds of mollusca. The lobsters find their way principally to the West Indies.

Halifax is within easy access of opportunities for rod and gun, which might tempt even the most fastidious sportsman. The streams of the Province abound in trout and salmon, and its woods in duck, snipe, woodcock, and plover, with an occasional moose or cariboo.

The Nova-Scotians, or Blue Noses, as they are sometimes called, are a most composite people, representing all the modern languages, as well as Indian and Gaelic. Consequently we find a Liverpool, an

Inverness, and a Londonderry; a Mabou, a Bras D'or, and a Wagamatcook; a Lunenburg, an Annapolis, and a Pugwash; a Tatamagouche, a Petit de Gras, and a Shubenacadie.

During the summer of 1534, Jacques Cartier made his first voyage to North America, spending much time and patience in search of a passage to continue his route westward. Disappointed, but not despairing, he returned to France for the winter, carrying with him some Indians, and made preparations for another expedition on a larger scale.

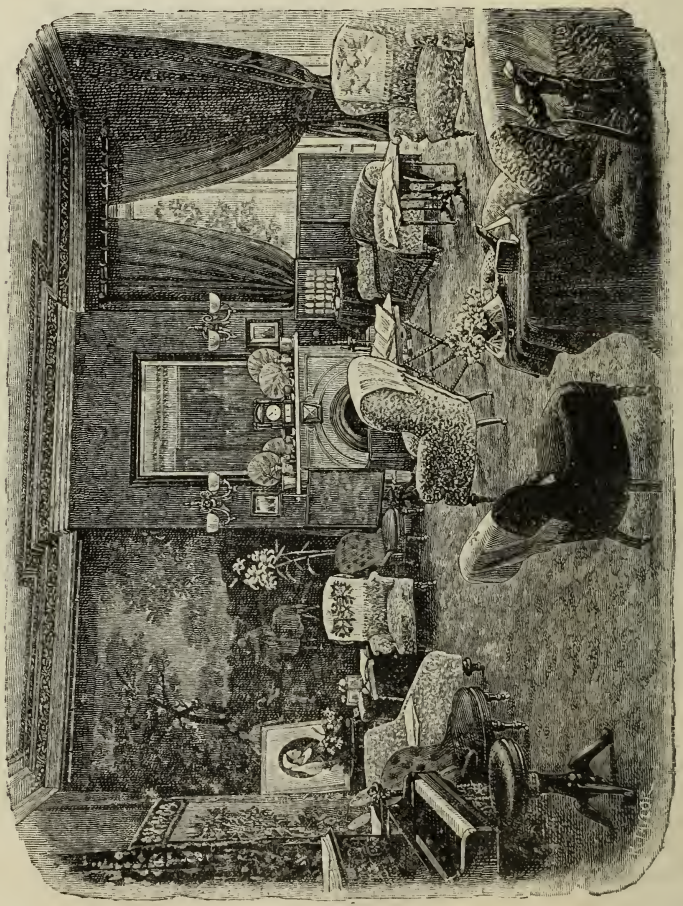
The following May saw him once more set sail; when, encouraged by information from his captive Indians, he pushed his way up the St. Lawrence, the savages on the shores mistaking his ships for canoes with wings. By the mouth of the River Ste Croix, now called St. Charles, and at the foot of a high rocky promontory, he came upon a settlement of Indians, fortified after their rude fashion, whose chief's name was Donnacona. By tact and generosity, Cartier secured for himself such an amicable reception among these natives, that after exploring some distance further up the great river, he returned with his adventurers to winter among his new friends.

But it was reserved for Champlain, on visiting the same spot seventy-three years later, the Indians and their fort gone, to recognise the natural advantages of the situation for a colony in New France; and the work of landing men and supplies was quickly followed by the building of dwellings, the construction of a fort, and the cultivation of a corner of land.

Then came conflict with the natives, war when necessary, treaty when possible, and eventually trade when practicable. When one bears in mind the religious intentions which gave a tone to all the transactions of the pioneers of France in the New World, the picture becomes quickly filled up by priests for the faithful, and chapels for the priests; teachers for the children, and schools for the teachers; nurses for the sick, and hospitals for the nurses; governors, courtiers, and soldiers. And thus, though surrounded by barbarism, suspicion, and implacable hatred, and torn by rival jealousies within, there grew, however slowly, out of the ashes of the Indian village of Stadacona, the modern city of Quebec, to which every Canadian points with pride as the Gibraltar of America, and which seemed to be a specially favourite residence of Her Royal Highness.

Occupying a site at once commanding and impressive, on a precipitous cliff, crowned by an almost impregnable fortress, Quebec possesses historical interest which ranks it with most of the ancient cities of the Old World, more than with the ephemeral growths of the New. Its wooden quays, tortuous streets, old-fashioned carriages, and antiquated buildings, preserved in much of their original freshness by the purity of the atmosphere, are in peculiar harmony with the quaintness of the French laws and customs of its inhabitants, and render it one of the most attractive spots on the North American continent.

Although the summer port for most of the ocean traffic of the Dominion, Quebec is not a city of rapid growth, its population having increased only about 3,000 during the last ten years. Owing to the liberality with which it has been the principle of England to deal with her conquests, the French inhabitants of Canada enjoy their laws,

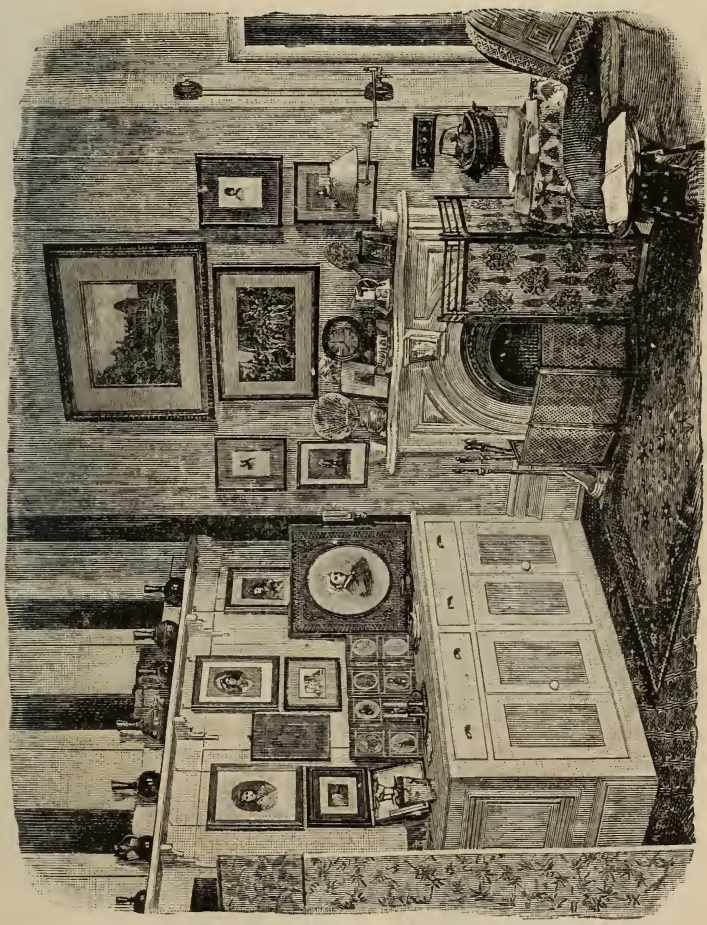


THE BLUE DRAWING-ROOM RIDEAU HALL.

language, and religion, and their English neighbours are beginning to discover what that implies. In agriculture it means the implements of last century; in education little more than the church catechism; in legislation the privileges for "The Church," the taxes for the heretics; and in everything the consent of the clergy. So that not only does immigration pass westward from Quebec, which is peculiarly a French city, but Protestant enlightenment and progress are being forced out of the whole province, wearied of a battle against a

million of a majority. New France is still as French as Old France, and much more faithful to Rome; and should His Holiness of the Vatican ever be driven homeless, Quebec will be the first to lay her fealty at his feet.

Before Cartier settled for the winter with the Indians at Stadacona,



PRINCESS LOUISE'S BOUDOIR, RIDEAU HALL

he resolved to see something more of the great river he was exploring, and in spite of the assurance of Donnacona that certain death awaited him, he set out, with the consolation that "God would guard all true believers from every danger."

Continuing his course, he came upon another village, situated on an island just below the confluence of a large tributary with the mighty waters that were bearing him along. Here, donning his best raiment, and providing himself with conciliatory presents, he landed, climbed

a mountain in the background, and, enchanted with the view of river and forest which lay beneath him, named the place Mount Royal.

When Champlain followed in the footsteps of Cartier, this village of Indians also had disappeared; but not to Champlain, as in the case of Quebec, belongs the honour of founding the city which is built on its site.

A religious enthusiast of Anjou, a tax-gatherer by profession, whilst at his devotions one day at La Flèche, declared that he heard a voice from Heaven calling upon him to found a new order of nuns, and a hospital to be conducted by them, on an island called Montreal in Canada. About the same time, a young Parisian priest was praying in the Church of St. Germain des Près, when a voice said to him that he was ordained to form a society of priests intended for the propagation of the True Faith among the Indians at Montreal. Both priest and tax-gatherer were unknown to each other, and were equally in ignorance regarding the island called Montreal, and regarding Canada; but they were miraculously put into possession of such information as made them acquainted with each other like intimate friends when they met, and enabled them to organise their scheme and put their designs into execution.

In the discussion and the maturing of their plans, Providence lent further aid to these devotees by sending to them, in the person of Paul de Chomedey, Sieur de Maisonneuve, a soldier-governor capable of undertaking the control of the new enterprise, and a small select sisterhood, who were "nothing daunted, either by the ocean, the wilderness, the solitude, or the Iroquois."

The little colony was solemnly consecrated to the work, and was wafted across the seas by blessing and prayer. When they arrived at their destination, after no eventless voyage, an altar to the Virgin was raised amid the wild flowers and the bursting foliage of the month of May, hymns of praise were sung, Maisonneuve and his followers devoutly kneeling, and the place, henceforth to be called Villemarie de Montreal, was solemnly consecrated to the Holy Family.

On this spot stands the Custom House of the modern Montreal, and although a public square perpetuates the name of Cartier, a small island in the river that of Champlain's wife, and an insignificant street that of Maisonneuve, the great tide of posterity which has followed in the wake of these pioneers has washed away their very memory. The Indian village has its name, Hochelaga, preserved in a suburb, and its site is occupied by a handsome Episcopal cathedral. The skeleton of an Indian in a sitting posture was lately discovered in the neighbourhood, and other relics of those old days are found from time to time in the course of the extension of the city.

Montreal is now the commercial metropolis of the Dominion, for which its natural position is admirably suited. Though nine hundred miles by river from the sea-board, it forms at once the

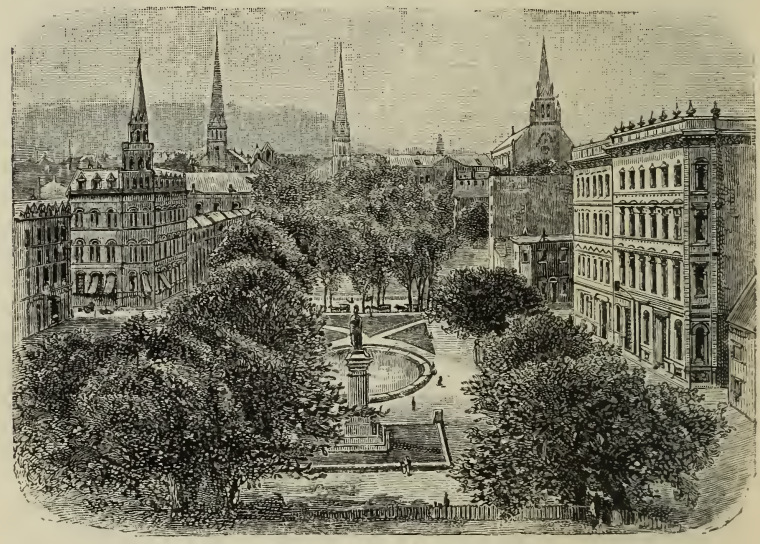
terminus of ocean navigation for the St. Lawrence and the key to the magnificent chain of canals which, with the inland lakes, opens up the most prosperous part of Canada.

The other places honoured by the residence of the Princess Louise cannot boast such ancient or miraculous parentage as Halifax, Quebec, or Montreal, but are the growth of the development of Canada in more recent years; and from none of them did she seem to escape with much regret to her summer home, chosen among the loveliest scenery of the Intercolonial Railway, and amid the finest and most romantic stream-fishing in Canada, from which salmon, caught by Her Royal Highness herself, in a canoe, with Indian guides, were sent to Windsor Castle.

PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS, OTTAWA.

And seldom has rest or change been more thoroughly earned and deserved. For Vice-Regal life is not an idle one, and the Princess, instead of looking upon her exceptional relation to it as an excuse for shirking many of its duties, seemed to regard that relation as an opportunity for performing them in a right royal manner. Many a gay scene of tennis and croquet on the grounds of Rideau Hall was lit up by her presence, and the cold of even a Canadian winter was not sufficient to deter her from gracing skating and other parties: whilst her example in walking, and in the dress adopted for such exercise, was one which is not altogether superfluous in regard to Canadian ladies. Foundation-stones were laid, memorial-trees planted, many hundreds of guests were entertained at dinner, and thousands at balls, theatricals, and drawing-rooms. An interest in all benevolent work; kind words to children in schools and convents;

an appreciation of worth and refinement in whatever degree of the social scale they may have been found; and a dignified affability to all—which is possible only to the truly great—have endeared the Princess Louise to every Canadian heart; whilst the encouragement given by her, as well as by her noble consort, to all that is highest in human nature, and the establishment of an Academy of Art, and a National Society for the advancement of scientific and literary culture, proved that she is following in the footsteps of her royal parents.



VICTORIA SQUARE, MONTREAL.

EVANGELA.

SEEING thee mine eyes grew clearer
With a light divine;
Hearing thee my heart drew nearer
To a sinless shrine.
Knowing thee my soul was lifted
To a world above;
Loving thee my life was gifted
With eternal love.

A. M. H.

A GUILTLESS SINNER.

By E. M. Davy.

TOWARDS three o'clock on a certain gloomy afternoon in November, Mr. Arthur Lee sat at work in his private office. He was twenty-eight years of age, handsome, wealthy, and a bachelor. He had shown hitherto no more disposition of entering the matrimonial state than he had of relinquishing the business habits acquired from his father. Business seemed to be with him—as with his departed parent—the ruling passion of his life.

He was of a reserved disposition, averse to society, especially that of women; and might have remained a bachelor to the end of his days, but for a circumstance which happened on this particular November day.

"A lady, sir," announced the office-boy, at the same time laying a visiting card upon the desk.

"Mrs. de Winton," was engraved upon the card; but the name was unknown to Mr. Lee. He intimated that the lady should be admitted. Whereupon, a tall and graceful woman swept into the office, the frou-frou of whose sable-trimmed velvet draperies made soft unknown music in the place; and the faint scent of some sweet and subtle essence entering with her seemed to pervade the air. Mr. Lee rose and bowed; intuitively he knew this woman to be of a different world from that of his experience.

"How glad I am to see—to know you!" So speaking, she held out a delicately-gloved hand, with which she pressed his warmly. "Mr. Lee, it is impossible for me to regard you as a stranger, though this is our first meeting. I—I—knew—your father!"

Here she sighed softly, as at some half-pleasing, half-sad remembrance; then taking a filmy handkerchief from her muff, and passing it lightly and swiftly across her eyes, she sank gracefully into the chair offered. While doing so she flashed a sudden keen and furtive look at the young man. There was a short pause. Then he asked quite calmly: "Can I be of any service to you, Mrs. de Winton? I do not recollect ever hearing my father speak of you."

"Sentiment won't do—he is too like his father," thought this astute woman of the world. She continued, on a different tack: "Mr. Lee, I will explain as rapidly as I can why I have sought you. The fact is, I have led a roving life for very many years, and am wearied of foreign travel and hotels. I wish to settle down in some English town or city as my home. Yesterday only I arrived at the Station Hotel here, and the idea—inspiration—whim—call it what you will—seized me to make this town my abiding-place;

the only drawback being that I did not know a soul in it. Then remembering that it was your father's native place, I ——"

"May I ask how you became acquainted with my father?" interrupted Mr. Arthur Lee.

"Twenty years ago I met him at the Old Hall Hotel at Buxton. We saw much of each other then; he was in ill-health, and spoke continually to me of you, his only child. A great trouble fell on me at that time. I asked his help; and his *kindness*—" she hesitated, after emphasising the word in a peculiar way—"his *kindness* made on me an impression that never can be effaced. Mr. Lee, I never forget a kindness; I never *forgive an injury*. But let that pass. Some years later I married General de Winton. He barely lived twelve months."

Again she passed her lace handkerchief lightly across her eyes, then after another pause, in a lighter tone continued:

"Now what I want *you*, my dear Mr. Lee, to do for me is this: Put me into communication with a house-agent, an upholsterer and decorator, a banker, and such tradespeople generally as you can recommend. It will not be troubling you too much, will it? No? As to my——means"—she changed her tone to one of fashionable languor, "I will leave these papers with you; they will show you I am not—*poor*. Will you kindly look them over? And—Mr. Lee—*might* I ask you to call upon me at my hotel to-night, after you have perused them?"

To both of these requests Arthur Lee assented in the matter-of-fact manner habitual to him. Smiling and offering a gracious apology for having detained him so long in business hours, the lady departed, Mr. Lee, in duty bound, with calm politeness accompanying her to the door. He then returned to his desk, and continued his interrupted work of considering appeals from tenants for repairs, improvements, and renewals of leases, which his occupation as land agent to the Duke of Wearshire entailed on him. At four o'clock as usual he left the office.

At eight o'clock he presented himself at the Station Hotel, enquired for Mrs. de Winton, and was shown to a private sitting-room by a waiter. At first it occurred to him there must be some mistake. He had entered noiselessly, unannounced, and was almost startled out of his usual equanimity by what he heard and saw.

"Love me, Too-too! Kiss me, Too-too!" a fresh young voice was singing gaily. The owner of it—a girl of apparently some seventeen summers,—dressed in a coquettish robe de chambre, her long nut-brown hair hanging in thick ripples far below her waist—stood immediately beneath the chandelier. Her lovely face was thrown back and turned towards one shoulder, on which was perched, nestling amongst her hair, a small white cockatoo.

The girl was far too pleasantly occupied to notice the stranger's entrance. She kept repeating the above words as a sort of refrain,

pursing her pretty rosy lips together and kissing the bird; which fluttered its wings, and made as though it returned her kisses, cooing softly.

The light from above fell full upon her, and a prettier picture could scarcely be imagined. "Kiss me, Too-too! Love me, Too-too!" sang the fresh sweet voice.

Arthur Lee stood fascinated—spell-bound. His senses drank in the scene with all its bearings as a poet or a painter might have done, though he was neither. All at once she seemed conscious of another presence in the room, and raising a pair of the sweetest, frankest eyes that ever met his own—blue-grey they were, veiled by curved dark lashes—she turned with careless grace, and held out her hand.

"Ah, you are Mr. Lee—my mother's friend, whom she expected? I will call her——"

"No," he said, "not yet." And unconsciously he retained, longer than etiquette demanded, the hand she had placed in his.

His eyes then wandered from her face to the bird upon her shoulder. "What a strange name to call your cockatoo. What does it mean?"

"Oh, don't you know? Isn't he an altogether *too* lovely bird—what could I call him but— Too-too?" she answered laughing. "Are you fond of birds?" she continued. "But what a silly question! I might as well ask do you like people. There must be loveable and hateable among both. I have not a friend in England, Mr. Lee, but Too-too. I have just come from a convent in France, where most of my life has been spent. Too-too was a sailor's bird as we crossed the channel; when we landed he would not leave me, so I bought him. I am teaching him to love me. Do you think he will?"

"Who or what could not love you?" thought Mr. Lee, as fairly bewitched at first sight by this sweet unconscious creature as ever was mortal man before by womankind.

"Don't you think he may—*in time?*" she enquired deprecatingly.

"I am sure of it. He must.—And your mother—how she ——" must idolise you he would have said; but broke off, ashamed of the significance of his words.

There was, however, nothing but candour in the girl's reply.

"Mamma? Oh, we are almost strangers to each other. You see we are only beginning to be acquainted. I can't sing to her and ask her to love me as I can ask Too-too! I have been nearly all my life in the convent, while my mother has enjoyed a roving life in continental cities. At least, I suppose she has enjoyed it, as she chose it: though I should much prefer to stay in one place.—Oh, Too-too! Are you tired of me? Is it that you also—you—like change?"

The fickle bird, finding itself unnoticed for the moment, had run down and perched itself on Arthur's hand, whence it walked solemnly until it reached his shoulder.

"But that is too unkind. Too-too, Too-too, kiss me, love me!"

and singing again softly the old refrain she approached her lips close to the bird; they were within an inch of Arthur's. He knew it; and trembled with an emotion he had never felt before. Another moment, and he would have yielded to the wild passion with which he was suddenly possessed; he could have pressed his lips to those that advanced to kiss the bird—when the folding doors which he had before seen but scarcely noticed, opened, and Mrs. de Winton entered.

"Leila! *you* here! In such a guise, and with that wretched bird!"—the pretty creature had fluttered back to its mistress. Mr. Lee, what *must* you think? And Leila, my love, your hair ——"

"I thought no harm, mother, and am sure Mr. Lee saw none. You ordered Louise to brush my hair, and let it hang ——"

"Sweet child, good-night. Mr. Lee and I have business together."

Thus dismissed, the girl kissed her mother on both cheeks—French way—and glancing shyly at Arthur, bent her head, smiling half-regretfully, it seemed, then disappeared through the folding doors.

To Arthur Lee it was as though the dark curtain had descended on the most beautiful play he had ever witnessed. The lights were out, and to his mental vision darkness alone was visible.

Mrs. de Winton watched him as he continued looking at the closed doors, a furtive smile upon her lips. Then seating herself asked, so suddenly as effectually to rouse him from his reverie:

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Lee? Were the papers satisfactory?"

"I think they appear to be so," he said, as he obeyed her, and tried to concentrate his thoughts.

"Have you been so kind as to make out the list I asked for?"

He selected a paper from the rest and gave it to her.

"A thousand thanks. To-morrow, quite early, I shall call upon the house agent. Now tell me about yourself."

"Myself? I know of nothing about myself that can be of any interest to you, Mrs. de Winton," he answered gravely.

"Everything concerning your father's son must interest me. They tell me you succeeded to your father's berth—you are agent to the Duke of Wearshire?"

"I am."

"What a thousand pities your father did not leave enough to make you independent!" she exclaimed, watching his countenance closely. I conclude the world—as it usually does in such cases—greatly exaggerated his wealth."

"Why should you come to this conclusion?"

"Pardon me—because you continue still in business."

"That is no reason. I was brought up to despise an idle life."

"Well, I suppose I must look upon you as, comparatively speaking, a poor man. Had the world's report been the true one, and you rich, of course you would have acted very differently."

"How?" And as he spoke one of those rare smiles that occasionally lit up his face, broke over it like a sunray.

"You would have thrown up the duke's agency and turned county gentleman. As you continue to hold it, I conclude you cannot afford to live without it. I am only sorry, Mr. Lee, that fortune has not dealt better with you."

"Supposing I confessed to you ——"

"Confess nothing to me. I hate talking of ways and means. If you have only sufficient for your wants as a bachelor, you are the safer from fortune-hunters. By-the-bye, may I come and see you at your house to-morrow? What is the address? Ellyston Place? Ah, thanks. I will look in about four o'clock, when I have done my house-hunting. You shall give me a cosy cup of tea in your bachelor quarters. I can dispose somehow of that big baby of mine, pro tem. I'll leave her with my maid."

"What, alone in the hotel? Bring her with you, Mrs. de Winton."

"You know what I mean by 'my big baby' then? You regard her as a mere child, too? I am glad of that—so glad! Ah, it is a terrible care to have a female child! In a few years, perhaps some man will want to marry her. If he has rank and title, I may—who knows?—consent to lose her. But, forgive a mother's weakness and folly! You, of all men, can least understand such feelings. At four to-morrow, did we arrange? Ah, yes. Till then, good-night. Good-night!"

When Arthur Lee found himself in the cold outer atmosphere he felt a slight reaction; and as he walked homewards through the lighted streets he went over in his mind the events of the last few hours. First he recalled the words and bearing of his new acquaintance, Mrs. de Winton, and he was vexed with himself that he could not entertain more cordial feelings towards her. Now at first sight that lady had appeared to him a clever woman of the world; yet she had evidently made up her mind that he was a poor man—or at least, as she expressed it, a comparatively poor man—one who was forced to work to live. Whereas, had she listened to the common gossip of the place, or what was much more likely for a clever woman of this world to do—had she enclosed a fee to town she might have obtained, from Somerset House, a copy of his father's will, whereby she would have seen he was not a poor man by any means; but, on the contrary—rich. After all it pleased him that she believed him poor. Had she known otherwise, perhaps ——

A throng of ideas, precepts, warnings, given him by his father, here recurred to him. Mr. Lee, senior, was well known as a woman hater, and as having done his utmost to indoctrinate his principles upon his son.

"Beware of women, Arthur," was his counsel on his death-bed. "They have been a bad lot from Eve downwards. They look on man as their natural prey. They'll wait and watch for him, and sneak and purr to him. Beware most when they are sleekest."

"I've never yet seen the woman I should like to marry, and don't suppose I ever shall," was Arthur's answer. Whereon the old man chuckled, as he said—"That's right, lad. I've saved, and screwed, and pinched myself for you. Don't let a woman spend a hap'orth of my coin."

But by the time Arthur Lee had reached his house in Ellyston Place, and opened the door with his latch-key, such memories had flown to the four winds.

The echoes of a sweet young voice that sang: "Love me, Too-too; kiss me, Too-too!" seemed sounding in his memory, while the graceful form of the beautiful girl with the rippling brown hair and the white bird on her shoulder, was almost as distinctly a reality to his mental vision as was the sweet song to his ear.

On the following afternoon Mrs. and Miss de Winton were shown up by Mr. Lee's housekeeper to his drawing-room. It was a large apartment, furnished in the usual style of forty years ago. The gas was lighted and tea ready on a side table near the fire.

When the host had welcomed and exchanged a few words with his visitors, Mrs. de Winton, with accustomed savoir faire, offered to pour out the tea, and suggested she should play hostess, with the real host and Leila for her guests. This arrangement suited admirably.

"These are by no means the poor bachelor quarters I had been led to expect," said the lady, seating herself at the tea-table and looking appreciatingly at the comfortable surroundings.

"The house, with all in it, is as my father left it. The expense of living here is not more than I can quite well afford," he answered smiling. It pleased, while at the same time it interested and amused him, to keep up this fiction of his poverty.

"I like this house and this locality," she continued: "the houses are well built and handsome. There is a well-to-do air about them that appears lacking in most of the new residences I have been looking at to-day. I have some thoughts of taking the unoccupied house two doors off this, and have appointed to meet the owner to-morrow, when I expect we shall come to terms. Of course he will require references, but with these I am well provided—my London banker and others—therefore I need not ask permission to make use of your name ——"

"If you require it, Mrs. de Winton, my name is at your service."

"O, thanks! A thousand thanks. But my banker ——"

"Mamma, I should think Mr. Lee's name would be of far more value here than that of anyone so far off as London."

Mrs. de Winton flashed a meaning look at Arthur. "Is she not indeed the mere baby I described?" she whispered.

The girl heard the words, and a faint flush rose to her face. She left her seat and, walking to the furthest window, bent her head over some flowering plants, as though examining them closely.

In an instant Arthur was by her side. "Do you care for these?" he asked, leaning with her over a large azalea. "I don't know anything of flowers myself, and am not used to having plants about my room. I sent out for these to-day."

"Because *we* were coming?"

"Yes."

"They are very well," she said a little doubtingly.

"You have been used to prettier flowers, perhaps?"

"O yes! In our convent garden ——"

"Tell me of your convent garden. Describe it—will you?" he asked eagerly.

"May I?" And raising her eyes to his, she read there such a look of listening earnestness as impelled her to go on. "I love to think of it even now," she said in a low tone, that thrilled with suppressed feeling. "The thought is like a prayer to me. Do you know those tall, white lilies that bloom on a stem so straight as if they would put out flowers to reach to heaven, but all at once stop short and bend their pure white faces as though too humble to look higher? You do? Ah! Then picture it! All along the moss-grown, red-brick convent wall stand rows of these, like nuns—or holy guardian-spirits, they always seemed to me. Lower down in front, a hedge of myrtle grew, and in front of that again, close to the ground, a mass of pansies—pansies of every kind and hue."

"But—the lilies would die when winter came? It would be winter even in your convent garden?"

"Yes," she answered, looking straight up into his face once more, "but before they died they had made their presence so much felt it seemed as though their shadows still were there. We scarcely missed them till the summer brought them back again." With a sudden change to a lighter tone the girl continued: "Fancy, Mr. Lee! one pensionnat brought with her a little book called 'The Language of Flowers!' Oh, how I longed to read it—and, when I did, what was my disappointment to find it all mere nonsense. The true language of flowers is a silent one; it could not be put in print."

"Language of flowers? 'Print?' My child, of what can you be talking? Surely they did not teach you frivolities at your convent?"

Mrs. de Winton had approached the speakers. So marked a tête-à-tête could scarcely be permitted to last longer.

"No, mother. No frivolities were taught us there," was Leila's answer, and during the remainder of the visit the girl observed a total silence, unless addressed by either Arthur or her mother.

When the carriage was announced, Arthur felt a restless longing to say something more to Leila, but it was an indefinite something, he knew not what. He stood bare-headed at the carriage door. Some flakes of snow were falling; the wind blew piercingly.

"How cold!" cried Mrs. de Winton, shivering ostensibly as she

essayed to draw up the window. "Do not stand there, Mr. Lee, I beg. We shall be near neighbours soon—till then, good-bye!"

The words struck him with a cold chill which the piercing wind had failed to do. "Surely I shall see you before then?"

Mrs. de Winton carelessly replied:

"I shall be very much occupied next week, but will let you know when I am ready for callers. Please tell the coachman to drive on. Good-evening, and many thanks for all your kindness."

Without another word or look, Arthur turned and re-entered the house. The change from extreme cordiality to coldness on Mrs. de Winton's part affected him keenly, but he was at no loss to guess the cause. She thought him a poor man, and believed already that he loved her daughter. And had she not averred her desire that Leila should marry rank and title? Rank and title! Empty words. *They* could not ensure happiness. Wealth, according to the code in which he had been educated, *could;* and he possessed it.

Three or four days passed after this, and Arthur saw nothing, and heard nothing of his new acquaintances. When walking to and from his office, he looked up at the house—two doors from his own—which Mrs. de Winton talked of taking, and saw no change in it; until one day he found the shutters open, ladders against the walls, and a swarm of workmen busily employed.

A week later, upholsterers' vans stood before the door, and at last the window blinds and shades were there, the door steps cleaned, the brasses polished, and he knew by the general aspect of the house that it was tenantless no longer.

When he had dined that evening a small and dainty note was brought him, perfumed, monogrammed. He opened it with an eagerness he had never known in opening a note before.

"Dear Mr. Lee,—At last the weary workpeople have departed, and it is my intention to be chez moi on Friday afternoons. On these occasions need I say it will afford me the greatest pleasure to receive your visits?

"Sincerely yours, Geraldine de Winton."

Arthur crushed the offending paper in his hand.

"I will go," he said to himself a little bitterly; "I will go, and she knows it. But surely it was not necessary to sting me by another proof that she had read my feelings?"

He rose and paced the floor with impatience. "It is not yet time to let her know my true position; when the day comes I will go to her fearlessly. Gold, gold, gold! Aye, my father was right there. It is the passport to every good the world can offer. If by pouring it at the mother's feet ——" But there he paused. "Good heavens, would I so buy the love of that pure angel?"

Three days must intervene before he made the call. Three days! Once during this drear desert of time, when passing the house,

No. 10, he lifted his eyes to one of the windows with a certain consciousness that he should see there the object of his thoughts. He was not deceived. The girl stood as he had pictured her; the white bird on her shoulder. He raised his hat, whereon she gave him a bewitching smile from lips and eyes—eyes that smiled beneath the veil of their dark curved lashes.

As all things come in course of time, so Friday afternoon came for Arthur Lee, and he was shown up into the handsomely furnished drawing-room of his fair neighbour.

He was not the only guest, however. The vicar of St. Paul's—the parish priest—with clean-shaven face, bland smile, and strictest clerical attire, was sitting and looking very much at home with the widow; while a young and good-looking girl, one of his many daughters, was laughing merrily with Leila.

"Then when may I number you among my flock?" asked the vicar, insinuatingly: continuing the conversation with Mrs. de Winton, which Arthur's entrance had interrupted. "Our sittings are supposed to be all free, but, in *your* case ——"

"Oh do not make the slightest difference on my account, Mr. Vaughan," the lady protested earnestly; "Leila and I desire to be among your most devoted, most humble followers. The dear girl is ready to be quite dévote. You will permit me to send weekly, and on all the saints' days, flowers for the church?"

"It would ill become a poor priest like me to decline so sweet a gift," replied the vicar.

Then Arthur knew that Mrs. de Winton had contributed the flowers for the decoration of the church, and that the vicar's call was made to tender thanks for them. The splendour of the flowers on the previous Sunday had been the theme of universal gossip, and Arthur believed he saw through Mrs. de Winton's ruse. "Ah," thought he, "she is beginning well. She wished to ensure a call from the most fashionable clergyman in the town. She has succeeded."

His reverie was broken in upon by Mrs. de Winton. "Have you heard from the duke, saying when he returns to the castle, Mr. Lee?"

"I had a telegram to-day. He arrives at the central station at noon to-morrow."

"And you meet him at the station?"

"Yes."

"I can imagine his surprise to hear that I have settled here. Ah, what a charming woman the dear duchess was! You knew her, Mr. Vaughan? No? —— Her health was sadly delicate. Those winters she used to spend at Nice —— days that I remember, alas, too well! The dear General ——" She broke off abruptly with a long-drawn sigh, then turned lightly to speak on some common topic of the hour. A true artist in her way, none knew better than she that a few masterly touches will sometimes produce a better effect

than the most finished picture. The vicar and his daughter shortly afterwards took their leave, as highly impressed by Mrs. de Winton's social importance and graceful courtesy of manner, as she had desired they should be.

"Mr. Lee," the lady began, sinking into a low causeuse, having first dismissed Leila, and she laid her long white fingers, sparkling with gems, impressively on his coat sleeve, "I have come to the conclusion to be quite frank with you and, in all the relations we may have hereafter, to treat you in fact as l'ami de la famille. Is this quite understood? Thank you. Then now to begin and expound my little plans. To-morrow I shall be at the station when the duke arrives. It is many years since we met; more than possible he has forgotten me. You will, however, kindly name me to him."

"Excuse me, Mrs. de Winton, but—do I understand you wish me to introduce you to the duke to-morrow, at the station?"

"That is exactly what I mean, dear Mr. Lee. It is all for dearest Leila's sake, that I am so anxious to gain a good footing in the county."

"But you spoke before as though you knew the duke. I cannot do as you request. It is impossible."

"Impossible? O, that is too absurd! Why, I could have brought a dozen letters of introduction from mutual friends. Is your duke so changed a man since I last knew him? Is he a Goth, an ogre, a something altogether outside the pale of civilised society? *Or* —," she continued, transfixing Arthur with a glittering glance—"*Or* — is this what you consider *me?*"

In vain Arthur protested that no words ever were more inapplicable to either side. The duke was a polished gentleman, not by any means averse to feminine society; but this admission only damaged his case. Step by step the ground gave way beneath his feet. The wily woman gained her point, being ignorant of the one argument he withheld—withheld because he felt that if she knew it she would despise him.

The truth was this. In all his intercourse with the duke, Arthur Lee had never once by word or deed overstepped the boundary line of their respective stations. He was the paid servant of the Duke of Wearshire, and an old-fashioned Tory, as his father was before him. He dined at the duke's table, on occasion; but he no more considered himself on an equality with the peer, than he considered his own office-boy as level with himself.

Next day Arthur Lee performed the hardest task that as yet had fallen to his lot. It warred alike against his judgment and his taste. Mrs. de Winton, exquisitely but quietly dressed, was at the station when he awaited the arrival of the duke. To all appearance her presence at the time was the result of accident, and when the train stopped and the duke stepped on to the platform, he glanced at the strikingly handsome woman standing beside him.

The glance was returned on her part by a slight start, a smile as of sudden recognition; a hand held out, then as quickly again withdrawn. The duke having shaken hands with Arthur, seeing that the lady appeared to be in the company of his agent, looked inquiringly at the latter.

"Mrs. de Winton, your grace," Arthur said: then stood stern, grave, with lips compressed, an unwilling witness to a scene which may be dismissed in a few words. The duke raised his hat, the lady murmured something about "unexpected pleasure," "met at Nice," "my dear husband, General de Winton."

The long aristocratic face of the duke wore a perplexed expression, while he listened deferentially, and in return said a few polite conventional nothings.

"Can't recall her in the least," he remarked to Arthur when the lady, with a sweeping bow, had turned away. "One meets so many good-looking English women abroad in a casual way."

But his eyes followed her; as a man's eyes—be he peer or peasant—naturally turn to follow a handsome woman, whether in England or elsewhere. It so chanced that Alice Vaughan and her sisters, being at the station at the time, had witnessed from a distance this little scene. The consequence was that before two days elapsed, the story of the incident was circulating freely through the town.

Then came the inevitable question, and remarks to be heard on every side: "Have you called on Mrs. de Winton? Charming woman; evidently moves in the best society; such an amount of 'savoir faire,' you know. Immensely rich. Who is she? Oh no need to inquire into her antecedents! *The duke* knows her well. She was a friend to the poor duchess when she was so ill abroad. The duke caused Mr. Lee to engage a house for her near his own; he manages her affairs, and is to show her every attention. Too grand for you to call upon? Oh dear no! She has the most charming manners; is *most anxious* to make acquaintances. She assured me of this herself. Not in the least proud. These real aristocrats never are, you know. Alice Vaughan says that the girl—who, by the bye, is *lovely*—is simplicity itself. Think of the advantage to our sons and daughters to be invited to the entertainments which they intend to give!"

No. 10 Ellyston Place was soon besieged by callers. The new showily-appointed landau with its three hundred guinea roans, belonging to the nouveau riche, Mrs. Shoddy, of Shopperton Villa, dashed up to the door simultaneously with the old family coach of Lady Vere de Vere, with her sickly son, poor and proud, but on the look-out for a rich bride. The clergy of all denominations came,—from the Lord Bishop of the diocese to the poorest Presbyterian preacher,—for was not the lady reputed rich and generous? The big China bowl on the massive oak hall-table was filled with cards to overflowing; and

when at last invitations were issued in Mrs. de Winton's name for a ball to be given in the assembly rooms—her own house being quite inadequate to contain the number of guests expected—the excitement in town and county grew intense.

The ball was fixed for the third week in January. Mrs. de Winton, with that certainty of success which so often seems to ensure it—in other words, audacity—addressed an invitation to the Duke of Wearshire. There was a meet of the hounds at the Castle on the day her note was timed to reach him. Mrs. de Winton drove over, was recognised by his Grace, and she and Leila were escorted by him into the Castle. The rest was easy to a woman of her resources. The Duke of Wearshire honoured Mrs. de Winton with his presence at her ball on the 27th of January. The entertainment was a brilliant success, and the lady's position in the county was established, while in the town she won golden opinions by her courtesy and affability to all and every one with whom she came in contact.

But all this time how prospered the love of Arthur Lee for the fair young girl who had so unconsciously and entirely upset his prejudices against womankind?

He saw her rarely excepting in the company of others. Mrs. de Winton threw every conceivable obstacle in the way of his meeting her alone. This, it is needless to say, instead of cooling his passion, served but to add fresh fuel to its flames. These women were so different to the women his father had condemned! Even the mother —towards whom Arthur nourished an indefinable antipathy—was evidently no fortune-hunter; if she had been she would have marked him as her prey. There was no question that he loved the girl, nay, almost worshipped her. To him she was fair and pure as were the white stately lilies in her convent garden, the thought of which was as a prayer to her. Could he ever forget those words? And to him—was *she* not an embodied prayer?

He went regularly throughout Lent—more regularly than he had ever done in his earlier life—to the services at the parish church.

He wondered sometimes as he took his seat on one side of the aisle how many men came there because their "one woman in the world" was divided from them but by that narrow aisle of stone. And then he thought "most surely the love of man for a good, pure woman is his best safeguard against the world—his surest guide to heaven."

At last the day arrived that was to decide his fate.

The blow fell suddenly from the masterhand of Mrs. de Winton; the result was what she expected and desired. Arthur had returned with the ladies after morning service on Easter Sunday. Mrs. de Winton dismissed her daughter with a look. Then she began:

"Mr. Lee, I think of breaking off all our engagements here, and leaving next week for London. My sweet girl must have the advantages of other girls in her position; she must be presented at the

next drawing-room; more especially now, when . . . . in fact I will confide in you. The time has already come that I once told you I looked forward to, but dreaded. Sir Algernon Vere de Vere has asked my sanction to his engagement with Leila. He is amiable, and the sole representative of one of the oldest and proudest county families. Leila has refused to see him since she heard of his intentions, but she is a complete child, you know, and needs guidance, poor darling. *Dear* Mr. Lee! you will, I am sure, talk to her? You will set before her the advantage of such a marriage? You will speak to her as to a dear sister of your own ——"

"This I can not do," answered Arthur firmly, compressing his lips and looking at Mrs. de Winton with steady eyes, but a face which had been growing gradually paler beneath her gaze.

"You . . . *cannot?* Why?"

"Because—I love her!"

He could not control the words. He could not recall them, nor did he wish to do so. He stood up before the lady, erect and manly; even proud that the moment had arrived for him to speak.

"You love Leila? Is it possible?"

"I thought you guessed it."

A smile of satisfaction she could not repress came to her lips with her reply. "How transparent, after all, my supposed cleverness has been! Yes, dear friend, I was indeed afraid at *one* time. . . . But ah, believe me! It was from mercenary motives solely that I strove to keep you and Leila apart. But for these, you are the man I should have chosen from all the world to be the husband of my child. As it is, I can but deplore ——"

The hot blood rushed to Arthur's face, his eyes shone.

"My secret need be no longer kept, Mrs. de Winton. I am a rich man, though I have neither rank nor title. If you will give your daughter to me, I will spend all I have upon her."

"Then why did you deceive me?"

"You chose to deceive yourself, so it appears to me, and, if you remember, you declined to hear the confession I was on the point of making to you. I will make it now, however, in figures instead of words."

And seating himself at a table Arthur took a note-book from his pocket, and in a business-like way wrote in pencil a rough statement of the money left him by his father, in the funds and elsewhere. Mrs. de Winton accepted his suit, but made sundry stipulations with regard to the mode in which she would expect her daughter to live when married, and to all but one of these Arthur quickly and readily agreed. What that was will appear hereafter. Finding him inexorable on this point, she left the room, promising to send in Leila.

Five, ten minutes elapsed before the door opening softly ad-

mitted the girl. She came in with downcast face and lips that trembled nervously. He caught her hands in his and drew her towards him.

"Leila, my darling!"

Raising her clear, truthful eyes, and trying to look at him steadily, the heavy lashes wet with unshed tears, she said:

"Mamma says . . . says you wish to marry me?"

"Oh, my darling, if you only knew how I have loved you!"

"Only I did not know. Perhaps I do not understand what love is quite yet, Mr. Lee," she answered, slowly.

"But I will teach you——." He! Arthur Lee, who all his life till now had scoffed at sentiment!

"Will you? Anything is better than ——."

"Than what?"

"Than marrying—" she broke off abruptly, blushing deeply.

"Sir Algernon?"

"Ah, then you know? I was afraid I should have been compelled—I mean persuaded ——"

"But you shall not marry him. You shall never see him again against your wish. Leila, you will be mine—my darling wife. How proud I shall be of you! I have promised your mother that I will live very differently when she gives you to me: a country house, carriages, horses, jewels. I have never cared for such things myself, but you shall have all that money can buy."

Looking up into his face and smiling the smile that from the first had bewitched him, she said: "I have heard that money can buy all things in this world excepting one."

"And that is ——?" he asked, a little anxiously.

"Love."

He had no response ready. He looked at her bewildered. Unconsciously she had touched a chord that vibrated painfully.

Recovering himself, he drew her beside him on a sofa, and began telling her how he had loved her from the very first. Then, responsive to his questioning, she spoke of her girl life, spent within the convent walls, and he heard her with the rapt reverence of a mortal listening to a voice from heaven. There are those whom love strengthens; this was a strong man made weak, and to grow weaker still beneath love's thrall.

The news of Miss de Winton's engagement to Mr. Lee spread rapidly. By many it was looked upon as a *mésalliance*, but at the same time a proof of the unworldliness of Mrs. de Winton, that she should permit her daughter to marry a man of so little social position; for money itself, they argued, to those who appeared so well endowed with this world's goods, could be no object.

The engagement became a nine days' wonder, and ended there; for, in less than as many weeks the marriage was performed with great pomp and ceremony at St. Paul's Church by Mr. Vaughan and

his assistant curates; and amid the usual formalities, rejoicings, and good wishes, the bride and bridegroom set off on their wedding tour. They were now irrevocably joined together, whether "for better" or "for worse" will be seen hereafter.

II.

Six months later found Arthur Lee a changed man. Launched into circumstances so entirely new to him, he became prodigal, reckless; bent only, as it seemed, on scattering to the winds the wealth that hitherto had lain useless. Nor was it surprising that Leila, his wife, introduced so young into a whirl of pleasure, should have been led—partly by heedlessness, but chiefly by her mother's connivance—to indulge in the wildest extravagance.

It has been mentioned that there was one requirement of Mrs. de Winton's to which Arthur refused consent. This was that he should give up the duke's agency. In all else he was prepared to run counter to his father's admonitions, but not with regard to the agency; he clung to that with a persistent obstinacy—almost amounting to superstition—because his father had desired him to do so. It was the sole remaining remnant of his old life.

Mr. and Mrs. Lee spent Christmas and the New Year at their country house, where they entertained all comers; the second week in January they returned to No. 12, Ellyston Place.

Between six and seven o'clock one evening Leila was awaiting her husband's return from his office, where he appeared to have been detained later than usual. On hearing his latch-key in the door she went into the hall to meet him. "Come in here a moment, Arthur, I wish to speak with you," she said, eagerly, after their usual loving greeting, and she led the way into the dining-room. "Mamma is in such trouble. But I have told her you will put all right."

And she looked up into his face with the honest trusting eyes that pleaded more eloquently than words. Never yet had they asked for anything in vain.

"I will do what I can."

"I knew you would, and so I told her! You see, mamma thinks a great deal about money, far more than you or I do. And she has heard to-day that she has lost almost everything. And there is the house and the furniture to pay for, and oh, I don't know what besides. But, Arthur, how glad I am that *we* have it in our power so easily to make all right! A few thousands—a *very* few—and mamma will be happy again once more."

Withdrawing his hands from her gentle grasp he sat down on the nearest chair. The lamplight shining on his face showed lines of care that had never been revealed before. "A few thousands—a *very* few!" he repeated, mechanically. Of late his eyes had been opening gradually. This was a more complete awakening.

"Arthur!"

His name spoken in a low thrilling voice, and Leila kneeling in front of him, recalled him instantly and hurriedly.

"Are you—are you—displeased with me for anything?"

"With you, my child? Oh, no!"

"Why, Arthur, you have always told me money was mere dross, only good to spend ——"

"To spend on *you*, my darling."

"But I have been too selfish hitherto, wanting everything for myself. This time I ask it for poor mamma!"

"And you shall have it," he answered, kissing her and rising, but still with a troubled face. "Did she tell you how she lost her money? Where was it placed? Not in the local bank, I know: which—you may have seen by to-day's newspapers—has failed?"

Failed and carried away thousands, not "a few" of Arthur's money! But of this he would not speak to his young wife.

"Oh, she says she gave you a statement of the sums and securities lodged with her banker in London, but she removed the greater part soon afterwards and placed it with a friend, at much higher interest, I think she said, and that friend ——"

"Of course! The old story. But your mother was the last woman I should have suspected of such folly. If she has done as she says, she is no wiser than her fellows. Her *friend* is not a fool, but worse."

"Yes, yes. But Arthur, the harm is done now; and mother is so wretched! She says she feels it so that she cannot bear to speak of it to you. Come, darling husband," and forcing him back into his chair, she knelt down once more before him, putting up her sweet lips to his. "Arthur, all you have to do is to write some figures in a little book you carry in your pocket, sign your name, tear out the leaf, and give it me. I give it with a kiss to mamma, and she is happy once again, and for evermore! You will do this for my sake, Arthur?"

She looked so truthful, so loveable and radiant as she spoke, clasping her pretty white hands together in playful supplication—what could he do but yield? "You love me Leila—now?" he asked, feverishly.

"Love you? Oh, Arthur!" and throwing her arms round his neck and laying her head upon his shoulder, she looked into his eyes the answer.

At last! Could he believe that he had bought her love at last? Heaven knew he had paid dearly enough to win it. But morbid doubts were haunting him. The echo of Leila's own words still sounded in his ears, "Money can buy all things excepting one, and that is love." No matter, that look of hers for the moment was irresistible; he took from his pocket, with a half sad smile, the little book in question.

"Yes, that is the talisman," she said, kissing the hand that held it,

"and here are pen and ink. Now let me see you write those magic figures that are to make poor mamma smile again. There must be four—but what shall be the first? I am afraid '1' will scarcely be enough. Perhaps '2'; but ——"

Arthur hesitated as his pen touched the paper. He made the figure '3' in conformity with what he believed to be her wish. With a happy laugh she held her hand out for the cheque.

"No, my darling. I wish to be the bearer of this myself. Is your mother in the drawing-room? Then I will go alone to her."

Mrs. de Winton remained to dine after the interview. No trace of trouble was visible on her countenance; on the contrary, she looked radiant. An understanding had been come to between Arthur and his mother-in-law, which at least afforded considerable satisfaction to the latter. During dinner, with just a sufficient show of emotion, she announced her intention of leaving her dear children in a few days' time to resume once more her roving life in foreign lands.

In fact, she had accepted Arthur's offer of settling her affairs—in consideration that she should in future reside abroad—with the same gracious equanimity with which she had accepted his cheque for £3,000.

"I am glad to have been able to help you now, for Leila's sake," Arthur had remarked, gravely. "Another time ——"

"There shall not be 'another time,'" she answered, with a bow and smile, which told him that the subject was dismissed.

Soon, a still greater change was observable in Arthur Lee. He looked ill and harrassed, both in mind and body. "Too many dinner parties; too much port wine," said the doctor whom Leila insisted on consulting; and he prescribed plainer diet and earlier hours. But when he drove off in his brougham, he shook his head. "Don't like the man's look," he muttered to himself, "something worse than port wine and dinner parties is at the bottom of it." But not being a friend of either husband or wife, he went his way, and straightway forgot the case of Mr. Lee.

Arthur Lee had not many friends. True, since his marriage—now nearly a year ago—he had entertained largely both in town and country, but could he reckon half-a-dozen, out of all the hundreds who visited him, as friends? No, he knew it, and the knowledge saddened him. He was tired to death of the shallow, empty life he was leading. Leila was all the world to him. He had squandered his fortune wildly, recklessly, because he counted it as nothing in comparison with her love; but—had he won it even yet? In the failure of the District Bank he had lost nearly half what his father left him. The sum total of the Christmas bills appalled him. Then there were Mrs. de Winton's debts. Ignorant as a child of the extravagance of such women—even of what they would call their bare necessities—he was, however, stricken at the amount he had pledged himself to pay. These matters all unhinged him.

One morning—it was early in March, and about a month after the departure of Mrs. de Winton—he seemed more than usually gloomy and reserved. In vain Leila, with light cheerful talk, strove to rouse him from his apathy. When he was leaving for his office, she ran to him in the hall, the white bird on her shoulder. "Love me, Too-too! Kiss me, Too-too!" she sang to the old refrain—so long forgotten now—and her voice trembled, her pretty lips twitched when, with scarce a kiss in answer to her appeal, her husband turned away sighing. "A child, pleased with a toy!" he thought.

On entering his office, the first thing he did was to unlock his desk and open it. As he did so his eyes fell on a letter lying near. When he had read it, the hot blood mounted to his face and receded, leaving him more pallid than before. This letter was nothing more or less than a formal, summary request that, as soon as convenient, he should send in a statement of the Duke of Wearshire's affairs to the duke's lawyer, Mr. Hall.

Now the duke had been on the Continent since November; and a few, very few, communications had passed between him and his agent during that time. This intimation fell as a thunder-stroke on Arthur; for some moments he was unable to realise it.

Calling to one of the clerks who sat in the outer office on no account to admit anyone until his return, he hastened out to see the lawyer. That gentleman was cold in manner, reticent, distantly polite; and Arthur said, with intense bitterness: "If I thought there was an agent ready to take my place, I would ask you to give the affairs into his hands at once."

"Pardon me," said Mr. Hall, "there is no need for such precipitancy on your part. You observed the wording of the letter?"

"It is in accordance with that, that I desire to act. My accounts are ready at any moment to undergo the strictest scrutiny. My books shall be sent here. A large sum of money is lying at my office in notes and gold, received yesterday from the C. estate, too late to bank that day. Within an hour I will place that money in your hands, together with my formal acceptance of this—dismissal."

"But, my dear Mr. Lee ——"

"There is nothing more to be said."

"Excuse me, Mr. Lee, there *is*. In the event of your desiring an explanation, I was empowered to give you one. On my own responsibility I will give it, although it has not been asked, assuring you at the same time that it is with the greatest pain the Duke has taken this course. Rumours that you were living—let us say—rather extravagantly, reached his Grace some time since; these rumours alone would have been deemed reasons sufficient for most landowners to place the conduct of their affairs in other hands. For your father's sake the Duke hesitated so to act. However, a circumstance came to his knowledge which decided him. The circumstance was this. He is staying at Nice. Three nights ago he went to Monte Carlo,

and there, seated at the gaming-table, he recognised Mrs. de Winton. On inquiry he learned that she had been a well-known habituée of the rooms for years.——I see I surprise and shock you, Mr. Lee, but the Duke thought it well that you should learn the result of his investigations. Mrs. de Winton was simply the daughter of a croupier in Paris; but she managed to captivate and beguile a certain General de Winton into making her his wife. The General had an only child, a daughter, by a previous marriage. Too young to remember her own mother, she was taught to regard Mrs. de Winton in that light. On her husband's death, which occurred within a year of his marriage, Mrs. de Winton resumed in a manner her old life, first, however, placing the child, whom she looked on as an incumbrance, in a convent near Paris. Many years passed, during which she scarcely ever saw her step-daughter; but, when Miss de Winton was seventeen years old, she presented herself at the convent for the purpose of removing the young boarder. The Mother-Superior of course believed she was relinquishing her pupil into her mother's care. Mrs. de Winton brought her step daughter to England, and to this town. That is all that I have to tell you."

"Thank you," replied Arthur. "I will bring the money."

In the meantime this is what took place in Mr. Lee's office.

Scarcely had he left it when Leila ran lightly up the stairs, entered the room where a clerk was sitting writing, and with a smiling "Good morning" walked towards the private door.

"Mr. Lee is out, ma'am," said he, rising as she passed; "he gave particular orders no one was to be admitted in his absence."

"He could not mean that *I* might not go in to wait for him?"

"Those were the orders, ma'am, and I believe he locked the door."

"Why so he has!" said Leila, trying the handle. "But see, the key is in the lock! I shall go in and wait for Mr. Lee's return."

Half an hour later Leila came out again. She looked flushed—excited. In her hand was an envelope, the flap of which she was pressing down to make it adhere firmly.

"I can't wait!" she exclaimed, breathlessly, as she glanced at her watch.

"Will you leave a message, ma'am?"

"Yes. Tell Mr. Lee—no, you need not say anything at all. I will explain." So saying, she departed.

The clerk relocked the private door; then resumed his occupation. In a few minutes Mr. Lee passed through, without speaking, to his private office.

Presently he opened the door and called out: "Charles, who has been in here?"

"No one, sir. At least ——"

"My orders were that you were not to admit anyone. Who has been here?"

"It was only Mrs. Lee, sir; and indeed I didn't think any harm. She said you could not mean to keep her out——"

Arthur clutched the door handle convulsively.

"It's only a few minutes since she went away, sir. She said she couldn't wait longer. She went off quite in a hurry. She had a letter or what looked like one in her hand, and was sticking down the envelope as she went."

"What did she *say?*" inquired Mr. Lee, hoarsely.

"Nothing, sir. Only that she couldn't wait. I asked if she'd leave a message, but she said no. Can I get you anything, sir?" he asked, with a wistful look at his master's face, which wore an expression of agony that frightened him.

Arthur stared at him blankly for some seconds, then said slowly, and in a voice hardly recognisable as his:

"You can go out for an hour. Yes, yes, I am not angry with you. Go. When you return ——"

He did not finish the sentence, but stood watching the young man in a half-dazed way pick up his hat; nor did he move until the sound of his retreating footsteps died away upon the stairs.

Then Arthur drew a long breath. "An hour," he whispered. "In an hour I was to deliver up the money!"

He listlessly sat down at his desk. Before him was a slip of paper on which was written the sum of money in notes and gold that he had left there. Could he by any chance have been mistaken? The gold he knew was right; but the notes? Oh, if he had miscounted them! No. Three one hundred pound notes were missing. They were there when he went out; but now were gone.

He flung his arms upon the table, and laying his face upon them groaned aloud. Presently raising his head he looked at the time-piece on the wall. The minutes were flying fast. In an hour's time ——

He unlocked a drawer in the writing-table and took from it a small pistol which had lain there for years. He remembered his father telling him it had been loaded many years ago, in the time of the Chartist riots. He examined it carefully, critically, though his hand shook somewhat as he held it. He raised it, and pressed the muzzle against his brow. How cold it felt. He withdrew it again and looked around him. Once more he lifted the little weapon resolutely, standing up; his finger was on the trigger.

At this moment the door opened noiselessly, and Leila entered.

She saw the situation at a glance. Never in all his life would Arthur forget the expression on her lovely face. She neither uttered word nor sound, but gliding across the room to her husband, she took, unresisted, from his hand the deadly weapon.

Quite quietly she laid it on the table among the scattered papers there, then drew a chair towards him, and with gentle force made him lean back in it.

She could not speak. The silence was too awful to be broken by words. Dropping upon the floor she took her husband's hands in hers, pressing them against her heart, her lips, her eyes.

He heard the panting breath, the hurried beating of her heart; he was as one stricken blind and dumb. But he could feel; and he felt as though he were in the presence of an angel.

"Arthur! Hear my confession," whispered the soft pleading voice of Leila presently. "On my knees let me tell you what a sin I had nearly committed. This morning a letter came to me from my mother; I did not read it till after you were gone. She was in great trouble for want of money, and implored me if I loved her to let her have two or three hundred pounds. I was to make a memorandum of the numbers of the notes, register the letter, and send it off at once; but on no account to tell you that I wanted the money for her. I came to the office to ask you for it, meaning however to tell you all about it. You were out. I waited till nearly time to post my letter for the midday post, and you never came. Your desk was open—that was why, perhaps, you had ordered that no one should be admitted—there were bags of money and bank notes in it. At last, thinking only of my mother's need, and believing that had I asked you, you would have given me twice the sum, I took three notes and put them in an envelope. But before reaching the post office some instinct told me I was doing wrong. Even to help mamma I ought not to take money that was yours without your knowledge. So I came now to bring it back. Thank God! Oh, thank God I came!"

With a sob she took the envelope from her pocket, and tearing it open laid the notes beside the others on the desk. "Can I be forgiven, Arthur?"

"Forgiven? Leila, you are an angel! You have saved me."

Whereon she flung her arms about his neck. "How I love you, Arthur! If it had not been for my mother ——"

"She is *not* your mother." Then her husband told her all.

"I am glad she is not my mother," was all she said.

"And Leila, will it make you unhappy to live differently?" he asked. "To have only one house, fewer servants, no money to spend on jewellery and expensive pleasures? In fact to take care of what we have left, instead of spending it lavishly."

"Unhappy?" she echoed, "nay, Arthur! If you tell me you are poor—poor even as the poorest beggar to whom we have sometimes given alms, I shall be glad, *glad!* Aye, a thousand times happier than I have been with all our wealth, because then, at last you will *believe* that I love you—love *you*, and want nothing but your dear love for mine."

At last he was convinced. To his life's end now, he would believe she loved him!

But they were not reduced to poverty by any means. True the

half of his fortune was gone; but the duke, hearing through Mr. Hall how matters stood, refused to accept Arthur's resignation of the agency, and wrote to him in the kindest manner, requesting him to continue the management of his affairs.

The following letter from Mrs. de Winton, in reply to one from Arthur Lee, must be given here. It is the sequel to my tale:

"NICE, *March*, 1880.

"DEAR SIR,—Your letter was superfluous. I had no intention of troubling you further. All that remains is to furnish you with the key to those actions on my part which you so severely condemn. I told you I met your father many years ago at Buxton. It is now time you knew the rest. I had reason to believe Mr. Lee admired me, and that he would marry me. I was in pecuniary difficulties at the time, and unable to pay the expenses of my visit. Presuming on your father's apparent regard for me, I, in this unpleasant dilemma, asked him to assist me. Not only did he refuse to do so, but he heaped on me such contumely, I fled from the hotel. Do you remember my words to you at our first interview? 'I never forget a kindness, and *never forgive an injury*.' You thought it was the former I remembered in connection with your father; but you were mistaken, as I intended you should be. On hearing of Mr. Lee's death, I sought you out, and found it easy enough to make you the instrument of my revenge, and through you I have enjoyed the inexpressible delight of spending a fair portion of that hoarded wealth which had been so cruelly and insultingly denied me in my need. Farewell. My love to dearest Leila. You have her; are you a loser after all? It seems to me at last we may cry 'quits.'

"GERALDINE DE WINTON."

When Arthur Lee read this he was alone in his office, and the paper fluttered from his hand, while his memory flew back to the dull November afternoon when Mrs. de Winton broke in upon his solitude, changing the whole after-current of his life. He imagined the air once more redolent with that faint fragrance which exhaled from her sable-trimmed velvet draperies as they swept across the floor. He recalled the feeling of repugnance, the natural instinct of aversion, which he had in vain striven to combat throughout his acquaintance with this woman, and he forgave her—forgave her from the bottom of his heart—for his gain was indeed greater than his loss.

YVONNE.

A STEAMER ROMANCE.

By the Author of "Adonais, Q.C."

I.

IT is Sunday—and the steamer is out on the open sea. A long, dark, handsome steamer it is; and it cuts a white path for itself through the sapphire waters, and leaves a shadowy, brown wavering track behind it.

Out of sight of land; ah, what freedom! Ah, what a free, deep, peaceful rest from the cares of the world; almost too deep for words. Just for this hour—or these hours—what has all the rest of the world to do with this steamer?

The strong sun shines down on it; the wide glistening heavens stretch over it; the white sea-gulls dance on the tiny waves all round about it; and it cuts its swift way straight on. It is a haven of rest, out on the open sea.

The passengers lie dotted in easy positions about the clean white deck; their hats drawn over their eyes; their eyes looking down into the depths. The lazy waves, and the black hurrying smoke, and the thumping engines—everything *speaks;* all in a pure, strange, grand language, that lifts these weary, worldly passengers out of themselves, up to a something immeasurably better and higher—if undefinable. Three of them lean over the boats; their heads down on the smooth white canvas; a fourth has cast himself full length not far from the funnel; here an old lady snores peacefully; over there, again, another plies her knitting-pins.

Upon the deck two figures only are in motion. They are pacing, pacing, as if there were no such thing as rest in all the world. The one is a man, and the other a woman; they meet and re-meet again and again; they do not take their eyes from the deck; neither appears to notice the other; it seems as if they were to pace on there for ever. The sun grows always hotter.

The man was a tall, brown-faced man of soldierly bearing, handsome-featured, pleasant-eyed. He walked with a sharp, regular tread, announcing that there was strength somewhere in his character. The girl was little and graceful, small-faced, lustrous-eyed. She wore a plain dress, ruby-tinted, that must have dated before the age of short, ungraceful walking-skirts, for it swept the deck after her two or three inches or more. From her walk one could tell nothing of her character—except that she was graceful. The man might have been twenty-nine or thirty years of age, certainly not more; he was assuredly a gentleman: the girl might have numbered eighteen or nineteen summers, but she hardly looked as if she numbered so

many; there was no mistaking that she was a lady. They paced on alone.

Suddenly something of an amusing nature seemed to have found its way into the man's thoughts, for an unmistakable smile crept into and played over his features. About the same time the girl's face softened, then broke into sunshine. She was opposite the gangway; he had to come to the wheel; they turned and raised their eyes—still smiling. The eyes met: keen, deep-set blue eyes, his; dreamy, large-pupilled dark eyes, hers, meeting in a strange fascination. There was an expression of intense amusement about the corners of his mouth, and a dark flush on his face; the girl, blushing painfully, was preternaturally grave. As the man passed, he glanced at the girl quickly and critically; then relapsed into gravity. Four, or five times more they passed each other; then the girl left the deck. The man half turned to look after her, and paced on as before.

Suddenly, something lying on the white wood, a little square insignificant looking something, caught the man's eye. He picked it up, and looked at it—and smiled. At the same moment the girl re-appeared on deck, carrying a bundle of magazines and a cloak. She settled herself on a distant seat, never so much as turning her head towards him. He waited until she was settled, then changed the direction of his walk sharply, and stood before her. She raised her small face, a world of cold surprise in its expression. He lifted his hat slightly, and smiled.

"Excuse me," he said, "is this yours?"

Astonishment, mingled with pleasure, flashed out of her eyes. "Oh—yes! Thank you so much. I must have dropped it."

He laughed, handing it to her; looking at her with interest; eyeing her over with the well-bred air permitted to a man of the world.

"Yes, you dropped it. I am glad I noticed it. Photographs are such—such disagreeable things to drop, do not you think so?"

He was engaged on a rapid mental category, something after this fashion: "Well-cut little face; prettier even than I thought. Nice mouth; lovely eyes; wonderfully sweet expression and ——"

She interrupted his thoughts abruptly, looking up at him very quietly. "Disagreeable! In what way do you mean?"

He started; and shot a searching glance at her, and laughed rather confusedly. "Well—ah—don't you think so? I've had such awkward things happen to me in that way. I remember once—it was on a boat, too—I dropped a photograph, just as you dropped this; and in the middle of dinner the steward brought it back to me upon a plate.—Tremendously awkward, you know."

The beautiful dark eyes turned upon him, clouded in something like doubt, and finally drooped back upon the photograph.

"I thank you very much," she repeated quietly. "I don't know how vexed I should have been to lose my brother's likeness."

He half laughed, looking down at the glistening card. "It was

just such another I dropped myself. You would have had my sincere sympathy, I'm sure ——"

She glanced quickly at him, smiling very kindly. "It was your brother's photograph that you lost too, then. Yes, I dare say I might have felt awkward if you had brought this to me when I was at dinner."

He leaned a little upon the arm of the seat, and smiled at her. He had a remarkably firm straight-cut chin and mouth; he looked well when he smiled, and he probably knew that he did.

"I'm sure I should never have risked anything so unpardonable."

She looked at him a little wonderingly; and dropped her eyes again.

"Are you—are you very fond of your brother?" she asked.

He laughed outright then, showing all his straight, white teeth as he did so. There certainly was a singular charm about the face. "I should have been—if I had had one; but I'm afraid you misunderstood me just now—because, you see—I never had a brother."

She coloured up to the roots of her hair, and started. "Oh!" she said, stiffly. "I beg your pardon! I understood ——"

"Yes—I know you did. Well, for the life of me I can't remember whose photo that was. It was a lady's, I know; I think it must have been my sister's. I *have* a married sister about, somewhere."

The girl settled herself more comfortably upon the narrow seat, and ostentatiously turned over a page of her book. A flash of mischief mingled with the amusement in his deep-set eyes. He hesitated a minute, and straightening himself, changed his tone.

"The next land we sight will be Flamborough Head; the last we sighted was off the east coast of Scotland somewhere. Nice boats these Dunraven boats."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Don't you think they are nice?"

"What are?"

"Why—the boats!"

She reddened again, turning over another leaf as she had turned the last one. "I don't quite understand you."

"Which is to say—pardon me for the liberal translation—that you would prefer to read."

"Thank you; I should like to read, if you don't mind," she retorted, blushing furiously.

He bowed low, and left her without a word, his mouth curling down in amusement—or pique—or something; and in another moment was pacing rapidly backwards and forwards as before.

The steamer hurries on; eight-bells rings out, and the old lady at the top of the cabin stairs bestirs herself, and disappears down the companion ladder. The captain leaves the bridge, and comes along to the main-deck, exchanging a word here and there with this or that passenger as he goes by. He joins the brown-faced man of soldierly

appearance; they pace the deck together, in the full glare of the sunshine, talking and laughing a little from time to time. A steward's boy trips swiftly about in his white apron. A low mowing and bleating come from the imprisoned cows and sheep in the lower deck.

Suddenly there rises into view a faint misty outline far away, to the eastward; the outline becomes more defined; the waves sparkle, and the steamer still hurries on, its brass and its shining wood glancing in the sun. Gradually the great yellow cliffs and the green grass, and the lonely light-house, stand out distinct and bright against a summer sky. The passengers rouse themselves, and get their field-glasses; the girl in the ruby dress shuts her book and goes over to the side of the vessel; only the brown-faced man paces on alone.

All at once there comes the sharp blowing of a steamer's whistle; *this* steamer answers back as sharply. With the rapidity of lightning, every cook, every steward, every man, woman, and child is on the deck. Another moment, and a long, dark vessel, identical in form with this, meets this one only at a few yards' distance. The little crowd of figures assembled on that deck wave and halloa wildly; the little crowd on this deck wave and halloa wildly also. Only a moment, and it is vanishing; the two crowds gaze at each other's receding figures, and the two crowds disappear. This little interchange of sympathy takes place twice in the seven days while the summer changes into winter, and the winter changes into summer, the crowds augmenting or thinning according to the season.

After all, it is just these little interchanges which bring a sweetness and a merriment into life.

The girl in the ruby dress stands by the wheel, and watches the receding vessel. Then she turns sharp round and runs fair against the brown-faced soldier. He steps back and bows without speaking; her dark eyes meet his; she hesitates, and smiles.

"Oh!—Is that Flamborough Head?"

"Yes. It looks very calm and Sunday-like, does it not? Would you like a glass?"

"No, thank you. Oh! and—I—I am very much obliged to you for bringing me back that photograph."

He bowed very gravely again. "Pray don't mention it; there is nothing to be obliged about. And now, can I do anything else for you—besides photographs?—Or may I resume my walk?"

Her face flushed crimson; tears of offended pride collected, and filled the eloquent eyes. He waited his answer for a moment; and getting none, bowed and set off away down the deck again. She turned aside, biting her lips in bitter mortification. Even as she turned, a low laugh broke out behind her. She wheeled round angrily, her eyes sparkling in the sunshine.

He put one arm on the railing, and smiled. "You gave me my congé so sternly a little while ago," he said, laughing, "that I thought I would just do as I had been done by. Nay," he added,

more gravely, "don't let us quarrel; one ought not, you know—upon a Sunday."

"I think you are very rude," she cried out, her cheeks flaming.

"I did not intend it for rudeness," he pleaded. "You are not angry with me? You are not going to quarrel with me?"

The anger died out of her small face, as suddenly as it had flashed into it; she was evidently a creature of emotion. "Why—I hardly know you," she answered, laughing, and looking at him.

A strange light came into his eyes as he watched her. He drooped them for a moment, then stuck one hand into each of his jacket pockets, and faced her abruptly.

"Do you believe in such a thing as fascination?"

The dark smoke of the funnel flitted about them; the yellow cliffs were already receding in the distance. The colour rose up into her delicately chiselled little face again, but she laughed quietly.

"Unhappily—I think you need hardly ask me."

He laughed himself, still with the same puzzled look about his eyes.

"Yes, we are most certainly a case in point; there is no doubt about it. But I meant even more than such a fascination as—as that. I don't know if fascination is the proper word for what I mean. Did you ever feel drawn to a person—irresistibly, unaccountably interested in them, haunted by them from the first moment they come across your path?—Mind, I am not speaking of love at first sight; I believe in that too; I believe there is no greater truth than that such a thing does exist. I am a man who has seen a good deal of life; and I am not by any means a romantic man. But I believe, as surely as I am standing here speaking to you, that there are people who give their very hearts and souls away to each other in a glance; and go through life adoring one another—all at a distance—up to old age; or maybe up to the end. Fate decrees that they should never know one another; fate decrees that they should live and die separately; and they do so—I am speaking of people—equals in class, you understand me—where the petty barriers of society are too frigid to be lightly broken; people who see each other day by day, and yet whom fate, or chance, or what you will, denies what the world calls an introduction. It makes one very bitter to think of it—and I am certain it is true."

She looked at him thoughtfully. "You speak as if—you had felt it."

He brought his eyes back from dreamland with a quick flash. "*I*—if you knew me better, I don't think you would suggest such a thing. But you know it was not love at first sight that I wanted to ask you about; it was the other thing—that strange interest with which one person sometimes inspires another. Well, I will tell you this: it is a very plain and a very blunt thing to tell you, but you must excuse me: I—feel it now."

She simply stared at him; her little flushed face looking into the sunburnt determination of his in sheer bewilderment, the curd-

ling waters rushing and seething around the hull of the vessel. After an instant's pause, he went on hurriedly.

"Did it ever strike you to wonder whether *you* haunted anybody in that way? somebody you met long ago in a crowd; or somebody who trod on your dress at a flower-show; or somebody, maybe, who merely saw you pass by. I assure you that last is not so unlikely. Is it not strange to think of these unknown chords of sympathy betwixt you and these unknown somebodies. And I will tell you another way by which sympathy unites people—by dreams. Just suppose, now, that all the people who ever dreamt of you were to come in a body to declare themselves to you, what a ridiculously incongruous, and what an amusing body it would be! You walk up a street, and somebody meets you; a somebody who has met you indifferently a hundred times before, but just to-day you notice that he looks at you intently, and turns away with an expression of suppressed amusement, and you wonder why. Take my word for it, he dreamt last night that you and he were eating baked potatoes, with lawn-tennis rackets for spoons, at the top of Lochnagar; or —or something equally ridiculous."

She stopped him, laughing in spite of herself. "Excuse me—but did you dream that about me last night, since you say you feel it?"

He laughed himself, looking down at her. "No—ours is of the fascination order; and I do think we ought to be immortalised by our suffering fellow-creatures, because we have done what I don't suppose any of them ever did before. We have felt it, and we have talked it out together in a common-sense way. Oh, but I beg your pardon; all this time I have been using the plural number where I ought to have kept to the singular."

She lifted her eyes to him, smiling and colouring very deeply.

The steamer hurried on; the drowsy passengers bestirred themselves here and there: Flamborough Head was fading into distance; the sister steamer stood out a black spot on the horizon. And only an hour had passed since eight-bells rang. An hour; only a short hour; and a glance had done it all!

Ah me!—let us pray for our eyes! We have need of it.

The hours went by. The steamer beat, and thumped, and hurried on; past this county, past that county—a glimpse of land here and there—then sea, sea. Faint, dreamily-tolling bells, and many vessels. Where are we? Coming to the Roads. A long, low line of busily twinkling lights, under a grey night sky. What is this, then? This is Yarmouth. A pitching, and tossing, and heaving. What, a storm at last? No, no; only the Nore; crossing the Nore—that is all. Night, sable night—and sleep. But the engines are little given to sleeping. If you waken in the small hours and hear them thumping and thundering—for they never seem to work so hard as by night —and raise your head a little, wondering sleepily: "Where can we be? I wish I knew just where we are," they will answer back to you at

once: "Never mind; leave it to us; you'll see where you are in the morning." So you turn on your pillow, and fall fast asleep again.

And in the morning you will wake up with a start to find a strong hot sun glaring in at you, through your little round cabin window; and a sound of flopping water; and the engines beating in a tired, peaceful sort of way. You spring up and strain your eyes out at the green banks, and trees, and little houses, and big houses, and fishing-boats, and sailing boats, and mighty vessels. "The Thames!" you cry. And you will dress and rush upstairs; and gaze.

That was what the little delicate-faced girl who had paced the main deck did; exactly that. The man who had paced it with her was there too, gazing also; only he had been there all night.

She has leaned her arms on the bulwarks, and watches the scene. The houses thicken, and the water loses its freshness. They have spoken of the green banks, and the river, and the big old veteran powder-ships, and the landing-stage to come; all in a friendly, kindly, half-indifferent way. And now suddenly, as the steamer flits on, and a great, white, German vessel casts its shadow upon them; as good-luck, or ill-luck, or some luck will have it, *their eyes meet.* Not casually; not indifferently; a long, searching, solving, reading look. After a minute he turned away to this side; and she to that side; but it seemed as if this look had in one moment severed the past from the future. And he bent his head low down, and looked again into them.

"Yvonne."

She started, and blushed; and finally stammered in answer:

"How did you know that my name was—Yvonne?"

"Because I saw it on the photograph. 'To dear Yvonne.' Yvonne—Yvonne—never mind your name just now. I have something very much more important to speak to you about. Listen to me. I cannot let you pass away out of my sight without at least an attempt to fight against it. I have thought of it all night. I have thought that it would be sheer madness; yet I must speak to you. You know nothing about me; and I know nothing about you, except this—and I swear to you that I don't care a jot to know anything more—that you are Yvonne. Dear Yvonne, sweet Yvonne! I think you like me; I saw it in your eyes that you liked me. As for loving, I am not speaking about loving; yet, oh heaven, could you read my heart, Yvonne! I don't know how to beat about the bush when I am in earnest; I only know that I wish with all my heart and soul and strength that you would promise me this: that if you are a free woman in two years hence, you will let me try to make you love me."

The sunshine flashed and played; and the great tears stood in her eyes. She raised them to him very earnestly.

"I believe in you," she said quietly. "I believe you mean what you say. And I—yes, I do like you. But think of the difficulties. In two years you do not know where you may be. And in two years you will have forgotten me. Ah, yes, you think just now

that it will not be so; but it will; it could hardly be otherwise."

"Yvonne,"—he stopped her with a quick movement, his brows knitted together passionately—"do you think I don't know myself? My past life has not exactly been that of a saint, but at least I cannot reproach myself with inconstancy. Let it be longer than two years, if you will; and you will see whether I can forget so easily. Do you remember what you told me about yourself—and I think it was the only thing you did tell me—that it would be two years upon the next twenty-fifth of December until you started for home? You said you had made the calculation, and that the twenty-fifth fell upon a Saturday, and that, come weal or come woe, if you were in life you would be starting by the steamer upon that day. I do not know why you should be so long away from home; nay, do not tell me; I do not wish to know. I will leave you alone during these two years. You are free; free to do what you like; to marry whom you wish; only, child, for heaven's sake, if you are still free at the end of them, be upon the steamer. Yvonne, I will be there."

There came a long pause. The passengers moved to and fro about the steamer. A gaily-built little yacht danced past them; and the captain—up on the bridge—took off his hat and waved it in greeting to somebody on board. Very slowly she raised her soft, dark eyes, still shining with tears, and looked at him. "I promise," she said; "and yet—yet I do not even know to whom I am promising."

He put out his brown hand, and closed it over hers, just for an instant. "Say 'I promise, Paul,'" he said. "It is not a pretty name, but it is a short one; you will not forget it; and it is mine. Repeat it after me, Yvonne—'I promise, Paul.'"

She repeated it after him as he told her. He dropped her hand, and they stood straight upright again and talked of other things. And the steamer sped on its way.

II.

A LONG, low, red-brick manor-house; a sweeping, undulating park before it; a forest of rustling pine-trees stretching away out behind it; and a strong hot summer's sun, blazing down upon it.

At an open window, round which the luscious purple creeper is twining, and the dainty hammer-birds are twittering, a little, delicate-looking woman sits with her hands crossed, looking out at the waving tree-tops. Her large eyes seem to have caught some of the sun's brilliancy, for they sparkle and glance delightedly, her thoughts some of its brightness, for her small pale face is the very picture of dreamy content.

"A year to-day," she murmurs to herself. "Oh, and it was just a day like this, too: the sun was shining, and the soft wind blowing. Paul what? Paul who? I did not ask; I did not care to know.

Oh, Paul, Paul; such a pretty name is Paul! He said it was not pretty, but it is; I never knew a prettier name than Paul. Sometimes it seems as if there was no other name in all the world than Paul—because Paul is so enwrapped with everything. A year! and in another year, it will be almost time. Oh, Paul! Will it be fine and frosty; or will the wind whistle, and the waves roll? Oh, Paul!"

The creeper rustles, and the sun shines; and still the little, delicate-faced girl dreams on.

Suddenly a grave-looking elderly lady comes quietly in, and lays her hand upon the girl's shoulder. "Dreaming," she says. And as the small face flushes consciously, she passes her hand over it gently, and smiles. "Ah, I see; well, I am glad there is—somebody, because I am the bearer of bad tidings to-day; bad both for you and for me. Yvonne Ogilvie, there is a change coming into both our lives, child. I am going away from this; and you—you ——"

Yvonne turned round from the window, and started in utter bewilderment. "Going away, Miss Marriot!" she repeated breathlessly. "Oh, Miss Marriot, what *can* you mean by going away?"

The lady sat down upon a low chair opposite to her. "How long is it since you came here as governess to my dead brother's child, Yvonne? Almost a year, is it not?"

"A year to-day," she answered quickly, half smiling.

"A year to-day!" repeated Miss Marriot. "So long as that! Well, Yvonne, I think you have been happy with us. I have looked upon you as I might have looked upon a daughter; and as for little Eleanor, you know that you are dearer to her than even I am. If during all this time I have confided in you next to nothing of my own, or of that child's affairs, it is because I am little given to confidences. Sit down there again, and I will tell you."

Yvonne sat down as she was bidden; a vague uneasiness in her expression. The lady took the girl's hand into hers, and spoke:

"My brother was not like me," she began. "He was very sensitive, for one thing; and he was of a quiet, retiring disposition—painfully shy. How he ever came to marry the woman he did was a mystery to me, save that she was beautiful; but, at any rate, there is no mystery about this—that she did her best to break his heart. He had been married just a little less than four years when the news came to me that, one dark night, while his yacht was off the coast of Denmark, he had fallen overboard and was drowned. His wife, with a party of her friends, was on board at the time. *I knew what that meant;* and I thought my thoughts; and I wept over my brother. Remember, what I am saying is in strict confidence betwixt you and me; I kept my thoughts to myself; and there was never a breath of slander as to the manner of my poor brother's death. I did not see his wife for more than a year afterwards. I did not see her until the day that she came to my home and sat before me; and putting all the boldness out of her fair face—as she well knew how—begged and

implored me to come and take up my abode here, 'for darling little Eleanor's sake;' while she travelled abroad for her health. Her health! It made me laugh then, even as the very thought of it does now; a stronger bit of marble never was chiselled. Yvonne, as she sat before me that autumn afternoon I told her—*that I knew;* knew how my brother came by his death. It made me shudder to see the abject terror and shame that came into her face, but my heart softened to her just a little when she wept as she did; and I came. Three years have passed away since then, and to-day, for the first time, she again let me hear from her. And what do you think is her news now, Yvonne?"

"What?"

"This: that she has married again."

"Married again!"

"Yes. She writes to me from London—just a few words. She says that she was married in Germany about a month ago; that she, and her husband and some friends—oh, Yvonne, I wonder has the woman no memory—that they are coming on here to-morrow: which, of course, means to-day. She tells me nothing about her husband, not even his name: only she signs herself, Eleanor Joscellyn. That is all, positively all, that I know. I am very, very sorry for him, whoever he is, poor fellow; only, of course, I cannot stay here. I shall wait to deliver up little Eleanor to her. It pains me to the heart to leave the child; but what can I do? As for you, what will you do? Were I speaking only for Eleanor's sake, I would say to you—stay; but for your own sake, my dear Yvonne, I must tell you, you had better, far better go away."

The girl looked round at the low-roofed, heavy-raftered room, dangling her small white hand out of the window, fingering the purple creeper nervously.

"Would she be unkind to me, Miss Marriot?"

"Unkind to you, child? Well, that depends upon what you mean by the word. She will smile on you, and cajole you, and introduce you to all her friends, just because you have a pretty face, Yvonne, and she likes to amuse her friends. All the same, if you were my daughter, you should not stay an hour in her house. And yet—you are so good, Yvonne."

Yvonne shot a swift, direct look out of her sweet dark eyes into the kindly face studying her. "I am not good, dear Miss Marriot; but you see, it is only for a year."

"Why only for a year? Ah, I understand—this somebody." And she added, laughing and taking her hand: "Oh, Yvonne—yes, child, I think you may stay. When you can blush like that, and when there is this somebody—I think you may stay."

And as the forest whispered, and the blue smoke of the gnarled old red chimneys went wafting away up into the air, Yvonne smiled; she thought of the wide ocean, the long dark steamers, the thumping

engines; of keen deep-set blue eyes, and a sunburnt face. After all, what was this woman, or her husband, or her friends to Yvonne? What was anything or everything; or rather what and who *was* everything? Paul.

Darkness has fallen on the manor-house, and the wind rustles in the trees around it. Lights shine out from the many windows, and voices laugh and talk in the long brilliant drawing-room, and go sounding away over the quiet park, for the night is hot, and the windows are open. Gay, showy music mingles with the voices from time to time, seeming to announce, just as they do, the style of people to be expected beyond the fluttering muslin curtains. The dogs bark in the distant kennels, and the little birds swing to and fro up on the branches. At the back of the house again all is quietness; a low window, from where one can listen to the whispering of the pine-trees, stands open. Down upon the sill a little fragile-looking woman has laid her head; she is sobbing, sobbing, sobbing—as only a woman in trouble, and the dark night wind, can sob. She wears an evening dress of some gauzy material; and the light of the flickering candle burns dangerously near; but she cares nothing for it, turning herself to this side and to that—and sobbing, sobbing. All of a sudden the door opens and shuts again hastily, and a man seizes both her hands in his, bending to her passionately.

"Yvonne—oh, Yvonne, Yvonne!"

She pulls them away with an effort, and turns her back to him, flushing up to the roots of her hair, and biting her lips angrily.

"Captain Joscellyn, how dare you call me by that name?"

He pushed the candle quickly aside, and took her hands into his again before she could prevent him, his face as dark as the night, his blue eyes flaming.

"Yvonne—for heaven's sake let us have none of this make-believe nonsense. I will not do or say anything which either of us might regret; but you *shall* hear what I have to tell you. I cannot rest until I do it. I shall never trouble you about it again—you may be sure of that, Yvonne. When I said good-bye to you upon the steamer that day, there was no man in all the wide earth more free than I, though I could not then conveniently marry, and never man meant words more earnestly than I did—those words I spoke to you. You went one way, and I went another; but many and many a time I thought that I could not wait—that I must trace you; for it seemed such madness to cast away two happy years out of our short life times. About two months ago I wandered away to Germany, still thinking of you; night and day thinking only of you. Would you like me to swear it, Yvonne? Well, I was passing through Dresden—and it was a chance that I did pass through Dresden at all, and I had just turned into the booking-office at the railway station there, when an old school friend of mine tapped me on the shoulder. You know how

things happen : a few hours later I was whirling around a ball-room with—my wife for a partner ; only, of course, she was not my wife then." The girl turned from him. "Nay, you need not be afraid, Yvonne—I am not going to say anything that I ought not to say. And yet—oh, Yvonne, I must explain what I have to explain ; how can I, unless I tell you all ! See, I can say this : I told you my past life had not been exactly that of a saint's—well, upon that very first night I lost my head ; I never lost my heart, never, never. My wife knows that as well as I know it ; otherwise I should not repeat it to you, but the head is more dangerous to lose than the heart sometimes. And so, the days passed on, and we were married. I do not want to excuse myself, or to attempt to justify myself ; I only want to ask you to forgive me. After to-night you shall be Miss Ogilvie, and I Captain Joscellyn, but, just this once : life is so short you know, and it will be something for me to carry through it : just this once, Yvonne, let me hear you say 'Paul, I forgive you.'"

His eyes were wet with tears ; his voice shook with emotion.

She looked at him very gravely and quietly. "I cannot say quite that," she answered firmly ; "but I can say, Captain Joscellyn, I forgive you ; if, indeed, there is anything to forgive. And after to-night—it is all arranged—I am going away."

He straightened himself, and crossed his arms in silence, the night wind ruffling his hair, and playing wildly with the flaming candle. "That means," he began huskily at last, "that you do not trust me when I promise I will never again trouble you. Very well, Yvonne, it is no wonder. That is all, of course, that I can say."

She stood before him white as death. "Captain Joscellyn," she said, "that day upon the steamer you left me free, and of course you were free yourself ; besides which, the whole thing was only a dream. You have nothing to reproach yourself with, so far as I am concerned. It is not on account of this that I am going away."

He stood for one moment irresolute, then suddenly held out his hand to her without a word. "Good-bye, Yvonne."

She put her own into it quietly. "Good-bye."

As if by mutual consent, they raised their faces, and looked steadily at one another. Keen, deep-set, blue eyes ; grave, large pupilled, dark eyes ; in both—despair. All of a sudden, a great cry burst from her ; down upon the table she laid her head, sobbing madly, "Paul, Paul—why did you do it ?" And almost in the same breath, "Paul, I forgive you."

With a bound, she was out of the room, and away. He made a rapid stride, as if to follow her ; then, stopping abruptly, he stood sighing, and passing his hand over his brow as if to think. Suddenly, with one passionate movement, he locked himself into the room, and with another, pitched the lighted candle far away, out amongst the dewy grass below, leaving himself alone in the impenetrable darkness.

That was all man ever knew of the struggle.

III.

A STORM on the open sea, and the steamer is out in it.

The great waves are flying from side to side, roaring, seething, running, rushing; throwing up pillars of swirling whiteness into the air. Darting, plunging, turning in one instant from brown to purple, from dingy yellow to emerald green; everywhere force, everywhere power; miles and miles of a mad, dancing, scrambling movement; hurrying lights and shadows; the wind shrieking; the black clouds tearing. At the far away shore, where the mighty waves bomb against the rocks, and the fishermen cluster together, holding on their hats and shaking their heads, even there it is nothing to this, upon the open sea.

The steamer is out in it. It staggers and plunges; it stands vibrating; darts wildly on; then stands again; the engines thundering madly; the black smoke gasping. A long, lithe looking steamer it is; but will it stand this, out on the open sea?

Down in the long crimson-carpeted saloon a little woman sits with her head bent over the table, an open book before her, her large eyes staring into vacancy. The wind howls and the vessel rocks, but she never even heeds it, only clasping the side of the table mechanically to keep herself from falling—and she is dreaming. No one could tell what is the nature of these dreams, her face is so still and changeless; except, perhaps, that she is dreaming not so much of some*thing* as of some*one*; and that as no smiles come to relieve the fixed look of eyes and brow, they can hardly be very brilliant in their happiness. It is a strange thing to be day-dreaming with only a thin plank betwixt her and eternity, and with eternity, so to speak, announcing itself in the voice of every wave crashing against the vessel.

One of the side cabin-doors opens softly. Ah, could she but see; could she only but see! but she goes on dreaming, all unconscious. A man—a brown-faced, handsome-featured man, stands irresolute, and then comes slowly forward; his brows knit, his lips quivering. Oh, Yvonne, Yvonne, turn and look at the man. She will not look; she only gazes fixedly at the swinging lamp above her head; until all at once her name is called in a tone in which it was surely never called before. She turns her head rapidly, and gasps, her face as white as death:

"Paul!"

He holds out both his hands; she puts her own mechanically into them, still staring wildly; and then with a fierce movement, snatches them away again. "What are you doing here? why are you here? They told me I was the only passenger on board." Then with a sudden burst: "Oh, Paul, Paul; is it really you!"

The ship rolls; he drops into the seat beside her, and smiles.

"Yvonne, why do you ask me what I am doing here? You know I am only keeping my promise."

A flush of anger covers her pale face, and she attempts to rise; but he pushes her gently down, and repeats his question.

"Yvonne, sweet Yvonne, why do you ask me?"

"Captain Joscellyn!"

"Nay—Paul." A thought of some strange nature seemed to strike her; for her face became deadly white and dazed again. Then all of a sudden, with a stifled cry, she laid her head on the table, and wept as if her heart would break. "Oh, Paul, I am so sorry; and yet—oh, I cannot tell whether I am glad or sorry. She is dead?"

He bent his head slowly, turning his gaze to the far end of the cabin. The storm raged wilder than ever. The dark narrow space at the end heaved up and down; the heavy red-cushioned seats around it rose and fell, like spectres in the darkness. He watched them dreamily out of his blue, burning eyes.

"Yvonne," he said, "listen to the wind."

She turned round upon him again, her features quivering. "Paul, when did she die?"

A mighty wave thundered against the shivering wood. He clasped his hands tightly over hers. "Listen to the storm, Yvonne. But it is already passing."

She pulled her hands away from him, and covered her face again.

"And to think that she is dead!"

He took hold of them once more, with a passionate movement; and spoke as though his soul were in his lips.

"Yvonne—listen. I am not going to ask you to forgive my folly, because you did forgive it long ago. Ah, yes, Yvonne, I have not forgotten. I said it would be something for me to carry through life; and I will never forget. Yes, she is dead, Yvonne; but listen to me; *all the past is dead.* Look, here we are back upon the steamer again; with the sunshine, and the blue water, and the little white clouds. Ah, Yvonne, sweet Yvonne, do you remember?"

The wind howled; the waves beat; the vessel tossed; a cold drifting snow mingled with the departing storm, and eight bells rang. What have imperfections to do with love? What has a storm to do with peace? To this woman it seemed as if the tossing steamer had turned to gold; and the raging waters, and howling wind, to a fairy dream of some fabulous enchantment; and life itself to one long sunbeam; the name of life and the name of the sunbeam—Paul.

To this man the past was as a nightmare; and the present the awakening from the nightmare; and the future a fair landscape, and a smiling, everlasting summer's day!

PETER MACKEY'S THREE SWEETHEARTS.

THOUGH I am, I suppose, an old maid, I take much interest in other people's love affairs. My friends know and humour this little weakness, and consequently in the course of twenty years or so I have collected a large number of love-stories. They are of all kinds—sad, joyful, touching, absurd, sentimental, or eccentric. But perhaps the oddest of them all is the one I am about to relate.

The reasons which decided me to spend a twelvemonth in a certain little Aberdeenshire village, unknown to common ken, need not be entered into here. I had a cottage to myself, and one maid-servant, by name Mary Duthie. And what a pretty creature she was, with her golden hair and big grey eyes, and tall supple figure. It was a real pleasure to see her at her work, in her spotless lilac gown and tucked-up sleeves, and to watch the fascinating, unconscious grace with which she did the simplest thing.

I am afraid I spoiled that girl. She was engaged to Jem Leslie, a farmer's son, who nearly worried the life out of her by his jealousy —for which I suspect he had sometimes cause. The two quarrelled nearly every Sabbath, but always made it up again in the course of the week; so that I was by no means surprised when Mary informed me one day that she had broken off with Jem Leslie for ever; but very much astonished indeed to hear a few weeks later, that she had promised herself to Peter Mackey.

"Well, Mary," I said to her, "I do not wish to intermeddle with love-affairs, but I must say that I think Jem the better man of the two."

But Mary tossed her pretty head and remarked with reference to her rejected lover, that "she was weary o' the creature's havers, an' had jist tauld him that he needna' fash himsel' aboot her ony mair, for she cud e'en tak' care o' her nain sel'." Peter Mackey, she told me, was about to start for Aberdeen, a well-to-do uncle having found a good situation for him there.

I knew something of Mr. Peter, as he was my landlord's only son. He was a tall handsome young fellow, with a "gweed aneuch heid," as his father used to say, but an all-too-susceptible heart. A pretty face captivated him directly, though his attachments were generally more violent than lasting. I had made up my mind that he would marry Jeanie Saunderson, a handsome enough lassie, a good housekeeper, and an heiress in a small way; but Jeanie had left five or six months ago for London, to visit an infirm aunt, and now Peter was engaged to Mary Duthie. I was vexed about the whole affair, especially as I sympathised with poor Jem Leslie. Yet certainly it was no concern of mine.

I do not think that Mary ever received any love-letters from Aberdeen. It was not the fashion in her village in those days for lovers to correspond. But she always wore round her neck half of the sixpence which Peter had broken with her, so that I began to be quite in despair for my favourite Jem.

But after three months or so from Peter Mackey's departure for Aberdeen, some little incidents occurred which showed up that young man in his true light.

The first of these events was the return of Jeanie Saunderson from London, and a visit paid by her to her old acquaintance, Mary Duthie. The two girls had not been together more than a quarter of an hour, when sounds of violent weeping proceeded from the kitchen. Hastening in to see what was the matter, I found Jeanie and Mary mingling their tears over some letters which lay on the table. Jeanie greeted me respectfully, and on my enquiring the cause of their grief, handed me a letter, saying:

"Will ye be pleased to read that, mem?"

It was an effusion of Peter Mackey's, dated nine months back. It began, "My dearest Jeanie," spoke of the writer's unalterable affection, reminded Jeanie of her promise to become his wife as soon as he should be able to provide a suitable home for her, and was signed, "Your own Patie."

I must confess that my first feeling on reading this, was one of satisfaction at my own discernment. "So you were engaged after all," I remarked; "but why was nothing said about it, and why was it broken off?"

"Ou," said Jeanie, looking at me indignantly, "Patie just asked me to be his wife the vera day before I sailed, so there wasna muckle time to lat it be known. And as for 'ts being 'broken off,' it's Patie ye must speir at aboot that, for I never heard tell o't till this day. Eh! but men are deceivers! But that's no' the warst o't, mem! Mary, give the lady Mrs. Birket's letter."

Mrs. Birket, it appeared, was Peter's landlady in Aberdeen, and had written that morning to Mary Duthie's mother, whom she had known when they were girls together, to ask some particulars of Peter's family and antecedents, as her niece and adopted daughter Mary Hine, was soon to be married to him.

"Heard ye ever the like o' that!" exclaimed Jeanie; "the man must be clean daft!"

I quite agreed with her, for I had never known a man before who was engaged to three women at once. Doubtless, Peter considered his first two affairs as mere flirtations; still his former sweethearts had in their possession a letter and a pledge which would be evidence against him in a court of law. But any proceeding of this kind was so foreign to the natures and prejudices of the injured girls, that I did no more than hint at it.

The following morning, Mary asked my permission to go for a day

or two to Aberdeen with Jeanie Saunderson, as they had thought of a plan for bringing their recalcitrant lover to his senses.

"Gin we dinna' mak' Peter think shame to himsel', my name's no' Jeanie Saunderson," were the parting words of that damsel.

Meanwhile, Peter was happy in the society of his (latest) betrothed, who was a very charming girl; and it may be a little to my hero's excuse to remark that few men could have seen her bonny face and listened to her sweet voice evening after evening without falling in love with her. The susceptible Peter certainly could not, but throwing all old memories to the winds, proposed and was accepted.

Such being the state of affairs, Peter's feelings may be imagined when, on entering Mrs. Birket's parlour one evening, after his day's work was over, he saw seated by Mary Hine—Mary Duthie and Jeanie Saunderson.

Peter's first impulse was to withdraw hastily, but Mrs. Birket made flight impossible by closing the door, and standing between it and the conscience-stricken youth. "Just tak' a seat, Mr. Mackey," said she, and the culprit sank into an empty chair, placed at a little distance from the other three ladies. The situation was awkward in the extreme. The ladies continued their knitting without glancing at him; minute after minute passed, and the silence became intolerable. Peter could hear the beating of his own heart; twice he opened his lips to speak, but no sound issued from them; an icy tremor ran through his frame, and checked his utterance.

I give what follows verbatim, as reported to me by Mary Duthie.

"Weel," said Jeanie Saunderson at last, "sanna we be sattlin' oor bizness eenoo?"

"Aye, lassies," said Mary Hine, "but that 'll be a haird matter, or I'm muckle mista'en."

"Ye see," said Jeanie, taking the initiative, "this Peter Mackey belongs in a manner till's a'. Ist na sae?"

"Aye, but we canna a' hae him."

"Just that. Noo, fat think ye, lassies? Sanna we appeal till the law-courts?"

"Mithna we jist set a' richt amo' oorsels?" said Mary Hine. "Foo gin we wus till cast lots for him? We've the warrant of Scripter for that, ye ken."

"Vera gweed," replied the others, and when Mrs. Birket had volunteered herself as one witness, the little servant-girl, Baubie, was called ben to be another. Peter's humiliation was certainly to be complete!

The lot fell on Mary Duthie.

"Peter Mackey," said she, "I ha'e anither string till my bow, so I'll e'en leave ye till Mary Hine or Jeanie; they're maybe wuntin' ye mair nor me. But mony thanks t' ye for yer kind offer, which I ha'e na forgotten."

Peter was too much subdued to offer a word in his own defence, and the proceedings were renewed.

This time the lot fell to Mary Hine.

"Peter," she said, "I winna' cast up till ye hoo ye ha'e wronged me an' ithers. But this I maun say, a bad lover's no like to mak' a gweed husban', so I'll leave ye to Jeanie, if she's carin' to tak' ye."

"Weel, Patie," said Jeanie, "gin abody refeeses ye I maun e'en ha'e ye mysel'. But it's on twa condeetions, min' ye. First that we'll be marriet this day month, an' second that there'll be nae mair o' these ongaens *aifter* marriage."

The wedding took place in due course, and Peter proved to be a most devoted and obedient husband. "Ye see, Mary 'oman," said Jeanie one day to Mrs. Jem Leslie (formerly Mary Duthie), "gin the gweed man sud turn whiles a bit camsteary an' oonrizzonable, I ha'e but till say till him, 'Weel, Patie, my man, it's a sair peety that Mary Duthie an' Mary Hine refeest ye, sin' the wife ye ha'e gotten disna' suit ye,' an' weel-a-wat or ever the words are weel owre my lips, he's jist as quaet's a lamb."

E. A. B.

JUNE ROSES.

THEY tremble over the garden-wall,
Laying their pure white cheeks together,
And holding a confab, great and small,
Over the drowsy weather.

They sleep, sun-touch'd, by the straggling fence,
Shrin'd in their leaves, like a way-side saint,
Great crimson drifts, where the breeze grows dense,
And the pilgrim insects faint.

Oh, gather them in where I sit and write,
Let the floor be strewn with their fragrant leaves;
O'er this broad, deep sill let them fall at night,
From their nest in the hanging eaves!

And my busy life will drop a care
In each deep, red heart where the light reposes;
Oh, June! thy children all are fair,
But fairest are thy roses!

E. C. D.

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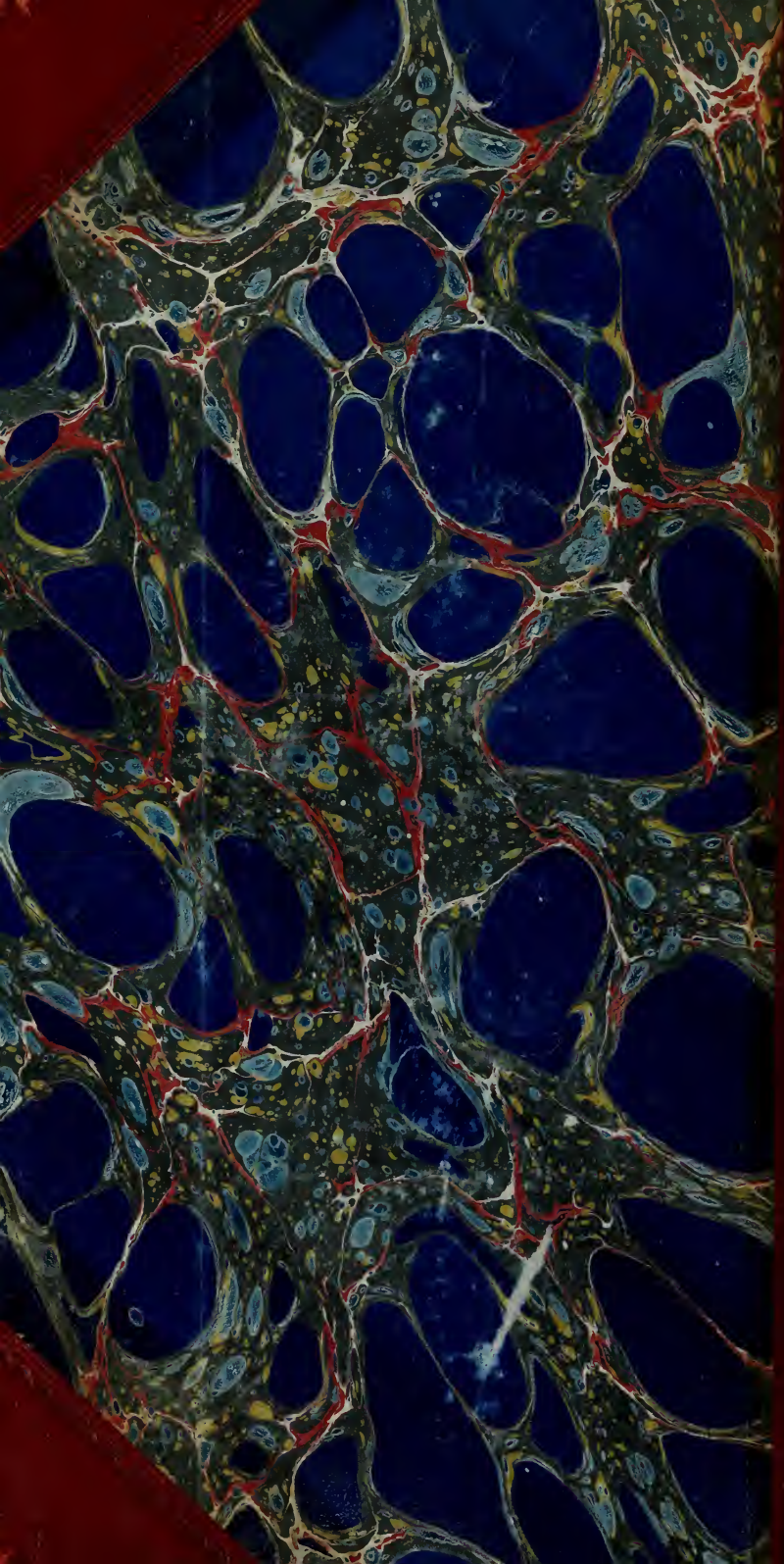
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